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ABSTRACT

The impacts and cost-effectiveness of adult basic education (ABE) in Sub-Saharan Africa were examined in a review of the new generation of ABE programs in the region. African experts and other international resource persons examined documentation from recent adult literacy, numeracy, and other educational programs targeted toward individuals over the age of 15 years. The study revealed evidence of the following impacts of new-generation ABE programs: (1) after developing literacy skills, women were better able to support their children; (2) participants were empowered to move from being passive subjects to active citizens; (3) participants developed more effective oral and written communication skills; (4) participants with new literacy skills were healthier and raised healthier children; and (5) many participants found more productive livelihoods. The study confirmed the validity of the proposition that many of the region's new-generation ABE programs have been able to successfully address the following criticisms of ABE: (1) weak internal efficiency; (2) poor retention of literacy skills; (3) costs that are too high in relation to outcomes; and (4) adults being too old to learn. The study yielded evidence validating the proposition that ABE programs in Sub-Saharan Africa deserve strong support from the international community. (68 references) (MN)

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AFRICA REGION HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
WORKING PAPERS SERIES

Engaging With Adults

The Case for Increased Support to Adult Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Africa Region Human Development
Working Paper Series

Engaging with Adults

The Case for Increased Support to Adult Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Jon Lauglo

Africa Region
The World Bank

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Foreword

Over the last few years, the Africa Region of the World Bank has worked to increase its assistance for the development and implementation of Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. This is in line with the Bank's increased focus on helping African countries accelerate their progress towards Education for All. The ABE programs are targeted at adults and out-of-school youth, have literacy and numeracy as a core, and include other elements defined by demand and context.

The reasons for supporting ABE programs are many. Basic education is a human right, and equity concerns alone suggest that high priority be given to the learning needs of illiterates and semi-literate adults and youth. Beyond equity, the overall objective of the World Bank's assistance strategy is poverty reduction, and literacy and basic education are key skills helping the poor extract themselves from the conditions causing poverty. More than any other form of education, ABE is self-targeted on the poor. ABE programs also succeed better than most other forms of education in reaching women. It is now widely recognized that improving the basic education status of women in Sub-Saharan Africa is a pre-requisite to achieving the development goals of enhancing agricultural productivity, improving the health and nutrition status of the family, and reducing fertility. Also, because ABE helps to empower the poor, such skills help build stronger and more inclusive societies, improve governance, and strengthen democratic institutions. Finally, adults who have at least achieved literacy are more likely to send their children to school, especially their daughters.

Despite the many positive impacts of adult basic education, support for ABE programs (including from the World Bank) has been relatively modest over the last two decades. The reasons for this are the concerns about the content and relevance of many past programs and the degree to which the participants retained their new-won literacy skills. There were also questions about the cost-effectiveness of such programs.

This study reviews these concerns, and assesses how successful the new generation of ABE programs has been in addressing them. After a critical review of available evidence, the study provides strong support for the proposition that the weaknesses found in many past programs can be successfully addressed, and that investments in this area deserve strong support, considering the many benefits of ABE. The study focuses on countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, but draws evidence and examples from developing countries in general. The study also shows that, although there is much variation, the track record of ABE programs, in terms of implementation and internal efficiency, is good. It also shows that programs managed by governments can, under the right conditions, be as successful as programs managed by the private sector or NGOs. Thus, the study emphasizes that there is no single recipe for success, and points to policy issues that should be considered—by client countries and by the Bank—when designing ABE programs. In cases when program design includes the lessons learned from the past, the study recommends that the World Bank should proactively support ABE programs within the framework of its overall education sector assistance strategy.

This paper is part of a wider activity designed to stimulate greater interest in adult basic education in the World Bank. Within this framework, publication of another study is forthcoming based on a project referred to as BELOISYA (Basic Education and Livelihood Opportunities for Illiterate and Semi-literate Young Adults). That project started in 1998 and enlisted the collaboration of African experts and other international resource persons in examining documentation from recent adult literacy projects worldwide. The outcomes were discussed at a workshop organized in 1999 in Chad. The BELOISYA project gave special attention to basic education for females, and to countries with particularly low primary school enrollment and literacy rate. It was a collaborate effort between the Africa Region, the World Bank Institute, and the Education Anchor Unit of the Human Development Network. In addition, major evaluations of adult education programs have been carried out in Uganda and Mozambique as part of this effort to promote stronger collaboration between governments and the World Bank in this sub-sector. Finally, in May and July 2000, the Government of Senegal hosted two major regional workshops on evaluation and monitoring of adult basic education. Senegal has pioneered especially close collaboration with NGOs and private operators as an approach to ensure cost-effective provision of adult basic education.

As indicated above, the work on ABE in the Africa Region has been closely coordinated with and is complementary to similar work carried out by the Education Anchor Unit of the HD Network. This work includes the study *Including the 900 Million+*, prepared by John Oxenham and Aya Aoki. There is also a series of case studies under preparation by the HD Network, and a Web Site is being prepared to back up and support networks of professionals and decision makers in this subsector.

The report has been prepared by Jon Lauglo. Over the last couple of years, Mr. Lauglo has been leading the work in the Africa Region of the Bank to stimulate greater support for adult basic education. This work—including the preparation of the present report, the BELOISYA activity, the evaluations in Uganda and Mozambique, the workshops in Senegal and much of the current country specific project preparation—has received support from the Norwegian Education Trust Fund. The support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through this trust fund, to stimulate renewed commitment to adult basic education, is gratefully acknowledged.

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The preparation of this report has benefited greatly from support and advice. The Nonformal Education Working Group of the Association for the Development of African Education (ADEA) gave valuable response to an early draft at a seminar in Johannesburg in December 1999. Comments on later drafts were received from Audrey Aarons, David Archer, Aya Aoki, Nicholas Bennett, Harbans Bhola, Håkon Bjørnes, Lalage Bown, Michel Carton, Birger Fredriksen, John Grierson, Agneta Lind, John Middleton, Jeanne Moulton, Bjørn-Harald Nordtveit, Susan Opper, John Oxenham, Alan Rogers, Denzil Saldanha, Adriaan Verspoor, Daniel Wagner, and Michael Wilson. The comments received at the Africa Region's Review of the study, which was chaired by Rosemary Bellew, were much appreciated. All these contributions have greatly improved the report, which is not to claim that it can reflect all the views expressed. Throughout, Birger Fredriksen provided consistent support from management for the study.

The financing of this study by the Norwegian Trust Fund for Education in Africa is very gratefully acknowledged.

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Engaging with Adults

The Case for Increased Support to Adult Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Africa Region Human Development
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1

Summary

In this study Adult Basic Education (ABE) includes literacy and numeracy, and other curriculum element to be chosen with regard to the local context and the target group concerned; "adults" refers to persons older than age 15. The following questions are posed:

- What priority should investment in ABE be given within the Bank's poverty reduction strategy?
- What is known about beneficial impact of ABE on people's lives?
- How effective is ABE in terms of learning outcomes?
- What is the internal efficiency of such provisions?
- What is the later retention of what is learned?
- What is the range of unit costs of ABE programs?
- What are the major policy issues?
- Are there generally preferable policy choices?
- What should the Bank do in regard to ABE?

Why governments, the World Bank, and other development agencies should invest in ABE

Basic education serves as a foundation for improved conditions of life, not only for those young enough to start in the mainstream school system, but also for adolescents and adults missed by that system.

Illiteracy is a major barrier to poverty alleviation. In a great number of African countries, it will take too long to reduce adult illiteracy substantially if one only relies on expansion and improvement of primary schools. Therefore, the problem of illiteracy must be addressed through provision of primary education of adequate quality to all children of primary school age *and* through provision of effective ABE programs.

Investment in ABE and in primary schooling produces positive synergy, in that ABE induces parents to give more support to their children's education. It is especially important to reach the illiterate mothers. ABE can also be part of a strategy to make schools more community based.

ABE is a means of alleviating inequity by gender. In most countries with low rates of schooling and literacy, it is adult women who lag most behind in their level of schooling. ABE programs nearly always find it easier to attract females than males.

Since ABE enhances the participants' sense of self-efficacy, it can enable disadvantaged groups to act more effectively in pursuit of their goals, thus making ABE a means to empower the poor and their communities. The World Bank's recognition of the role of civil society for good governance and for poverty reduction highlights the importance of empowerment effects. The more participatory forms of pedagogy—at least a style of teaching which treats learners with respect—will be better for building such individual and group efficacy.

Literate mothers are better able to protect their children's health. This is true for literate mothers in general, and some studies show such effects from mothers' participation specifically in ABE.

Lack of literacy and of arithmetic skills are barriers to entrepreneurship and market transactions. Some evaluations report improved livelihoods as direct results of ABE.

Earlier allegations about generally poor internal efficiency of ABE are contradicted by the bulk of evidence now available.[1]

- Producing "minimum literacy" is achieved at less cost among the kinds of adults and youth who are motivated to take part in ABE, than the cost of 3-4 years of primary schooling.
- Early dropout in a course is not a very appropriate measure of efficiency in ABE. Nonetheless, in most programs covered in recent reviews at least half of those who enter complete the course and meet minimum performance criteria. But there is much variation, and therefore a need to monitor internal efficiency.
- Such limited research as has been done indicates that the loss of reading and arithmetic skills acquired from ABE is not an internationally pervasive problem—though a literate environment helps ensure improvement rather than loss of skills.

With regard to achieving "good internal efficiency," the findings do not point to any single prototype of uniquely superior teaching and learning methods. More than one route has worked well.

Most completers of ABE courses show only a modest mastery of literacy skills. However, what matters more is whether the mastery is sufficient to facilitate further learning; and it could be that other "empowering" social skills and networks are even more important outcomes than literacy and numeracy acquisition as such.

A government that is prepared to strengthen its support for ABE needs to consider a range of policy issues. These include:

- What groups to target?
- What are the roles for various organs of government and for NGOs?
- What are the roles for businesses and industry?
- What language policy to adopt?
- How firmly should ABE be institutionalized (e.g., the contrast between campaigns and permanent institutions, between volunteers or civil servants)?
- Apart from literacy and numeracy, what should ABE teach?
- Should ABE give officially recognized equivalence to formal schooling?
- What role should information and communications technology play?
- How far can participatory pedagogy be implemented?
- How to build local social support for ABE?
- How to ensure adequate monitoring?
- How to finance ABE?

These general recommendations are offered to World Bank clients:

- Recognize the importance of ABE for achieving Education For All.
- Give strong political leadership to ABE; find good staff for key government positions; be prepared for considerable investment in institutional development. Consider forms of public administration of ABE other than normal government departments.
- Target especially women and out-of-school adolescents.
- Diversify programs to be responsive to local demand.
- Look for opportunities to initiate ABE in already established groups.
- Build partnerships with NGOs/CBOs and with enterprises.
- Use local languages for initial literacy teaching, and provide a route to the official language for those who have acquired literacy.
- Recruit teachers locally and use short-term contracts.
- Good ABE curricula and materials respond to what learners want and adapt to the local context.
- Prevention of HIV and caring for AIDS victims should be part of ABE curriculum.
- Back ABE up with radio, but don't expect much match between the timing of radio programs and topics taught by instructors.
- Good methods will show respect for the learners and seek to make them active participants.
- Accommodate within ABE opportunities for continuing education.

- Monitor ABE carefully but in ways that are participatory and helpful to providers.
- No one who wishes to attend ABE should be unable to do so because of an inability to pay.

Given the recognition of the importance of ABE for poverty reduction, it is recommended that the Africa Region of the World Bank advocate ABE programs, help countries prepare and finance such programs, as well as mobilize financial support from other external agencies, and work actively to improve and share the knowledge base for good practice in ABE. Finally, to be able to provide increasing assistance to clients in this area, the Bank will need to enhance its own technical capacity within this sub-sector.

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1. It should also be noted that the trend in recent ABE provisions is to respond to active demand by local groups—unlike the early "mass campaigns" that sought to "eradicate illiteracy" by also roping in the more reluctant learners. Better efficiency should follow from this trend.

2

Adult Basic Education and the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy

Support for the development of a broadly based civil society that includes the poor is a key element in the World Bank's strategy for poverty reduction as expressed in its Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF). This is based on the recognition that good governance requires the involvement of the poor and minority groups in decisions affecting their conditions of life—they should not merely be seen as beneficiaries of interventions purporting to serve them. This perspective makes Adult Basic Education (ABE) more than a valuable complement to primary schooling in promoting Education for All. ABE has an important role to play in building a broadly based civil society that includes the poor. It thereby becomes a key element in an effective poverty alleviation strategy. As part of this general function, ABE can facilitate community involvement of the poor in their local primary school. In a review of Community Support for Basic Education, Watts (forthcoming) observes that "Activities such as adult literacy classes can provide community members with the skills and confidence to contribute to school management" (p. 34).

Other important documents (e.g., the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) spell out in more concrete terms the Bank's strategy and reiterate the importance of building a broadly based civil society. One of several justifications for this emphasis is that nongovernment organizations that serve the poor, act on behalf of the poor, and especially if they directly represent the poor, will help make public agencies more responsive to those whom they should serve—good governance will develop in response to demand. The Bank's recent policy analysis of conditions for development in Africa (*Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?*) also refers to this need to empower citizens so that they are better able to hold government accountable (World Bank 2000: 64,72).

Poverty viewed as an unacceptable deprivation in human well-being is multi-dimensional. For some time it has been recognized that poverty encompasses not only low monetary income and low consumption; it also includes poor health, poor nutrition, and a lack of basic education. In the *World Development Report for 2000/1—Attacking Poverty*, a further dimension is recognized as part of poverty: deprivation of a social and political kind—lack of self-respect, lack of dignity, lack of "voice," and powerlessness.[1]

The 2000/1 World Development Report presents a framework of action that rests on three "pillars." The first pillar mentioned is "empowerment." The other pillars are: helping the poor to manage the risks they face in their everyday lives, managing national downturns to minimize their impact on the poor; and providing economic opportunity for the poor by building up their assets and increasing the returns on these assets through a combination of market-oriented and non-market actions. Empowering the poor is seen as helping to change state institutions so that they become more pro-poor, at the same time that pro-poor institutions help to empower the poor. In addition to suggesting various organizational measures, the World Development Report points to the importance of poor people acting collectively in pursuit of their interests.

The findings reviewed in this study show, first, that Adult Basic Education increases participants' efficacy for individual or collective action. Regardless of whether there is much deliberate focus on "empowerment" in a particular ABE program, an increased sense of efficacy is a widely documented outcome. This makes ABE an expedient means for attacking the social aspects of poverty. Since ABE in most countries is more successful in reaching women than men, it is also a means of redressing power imbalances between men and women.

Second, the present study documents that ABE has consistently been shown to have a synergy effect on children's primary schooling. Thus ABE contributes to basic education not only for the participants but also for their children.

Third, a number of studies show positive effects of ABE on the health of family members.

Fourth, does ABE alleviate poverty as it has traditionally been conceptualized, by improving consumption and income? Research that quantifies this payoff specifically for ABE is lacking, but if one assumes that ABE has similar economic benefits for its adult participants as primary schooling has been shown to have, then ABE is a good investment in improved livelihoods. One finding is that ABE widens the range of confident behavior in the market place—when you can read, write and calculate, you buy and sell with less fear of being cheated; you can better compete with others and deal in a wider market. Illiteracy and lack of basic arithmetic skills hinder entrepreneurship.

Fifth, in implementing ABE, there is an advantage to a partnership between government and civil society—in accord with the World Bank's overall strategy.

Another reason that ABE should be seen as an integral part of poverty reduction is that it is in practice self-targeted upon the poor. Those who have been missed by primary school, or who have left school before achieving literacy, will very disproportionately be those from the poorest groups in a society.

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1. A narrow definition of power is capacity to achieve one's goals in the face of resistance. "Voice" is wider—a chance to be heard when decisions are made. In a strict sense, "empowerment" would then be improved capacity to overcome resistance in pursuit of one's goals. But it has in fact come to be used in a broad sense that includes "voice" and more general exertion of influence, in the process losing much of its original connotation of an underlying conflict model of society (and of a zero-sum concept of power). Today it often seems to refer to nothing more than personal or collective efficacy—capacity to achieve goals that one consciously has set for oneself, and being aware of this capacity. In this report "empowerment" is used in this wide sense.

3

ABE: Literacy, Numeracy, and Context-dependent Other Learning

Adult Basic Education is intended for illiterate and semi-literate persons thought to be too old to enter primary school. Literacy and numeracy skills will be a common denominator among varieties of ABE.[1] However, other knowledge and skills will also be taught, depending on what is held to be "basic" in a particular context—that is, what is deemed to serve as a basis for other kinds of valued learning or important activities. Apart from literacy and numeracy, what counts as "basic" could be practical skills relating to livelihood, health, nutrition, and child care. But it could also include civic education (e.g., legal rights, environmental issues, social participation) and artistic or religious expression. Apart from "contents" objectives, the overarching goal can be a general enhancement of people's capacity and confidence for individual or collective action in order to improve their conditions of life—"empowerment" in the wide sense.

It is important not to prejudge what is basic detached from a particular context. Adult learners differ in what knowledge they need, want, and what they already know well enough already. In addition, it would be unduly narrow to confine a concept of the purposes of ABE to only knowledge and mastery of skills that can be specified in terms of contents. In any event, in ABE, as in other forms of education that extend beyond mastery of concrete specifics, development of less tangible process skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving, are crucially important.

In practical terms the contents of ABE provisions should be conditioned by the age of the learners. Adult basic education aims to serve persons deemed too old to attend regular classes in primary school and who have been missed by primary schooling—at least to the extent that they did not acquire basic literacy skills there; but this is a very wide age range. If the target group for a particular ABE provision is quite young, more adolescent than adult, the contents will tend to be more school-like, and the reason for building bridges to the formal system will be stronger. Conversely, if the target group is mature adults who are not primarily motivated by the desire to gain credentials for access to further schooling, the demand for contents akin to any fixed school curriculum will be weaker, and the case for relating the contents directly to the life they are already living, or to economic opportunities they could realistically get direct access to through ABE, will be stronger. Other traits of a target group that may have consequences for contents include geographical area, type of economic activity, and gender—but there can be no fixed formula for what these other traits should be.

The terms "nonformal education" and "literacy education" have both been used to refer to basic education for adults. However, nonformal would include all forms of deliberately organized education outside the mainstream education system with its hierarchically organized stages, not only that which is basic and not only that which serves adults. Adult Basic Education will usually have characteristics of nonformal provisions, but it can also be highly institutionalized and school-like (e.g., evening classes based at schools) with bridges to the formal system. "Literacy education" would in a narrow sense mean the teaching of reading and writing. However, the "literacy" concept has been stretched not only to include numeracy, but also

practical skills related to health, nutrition, and livelihood as in UNESCO's "functional literacy." Basic education would not necessarily be confined to such skills.

On the other hand, for the purposes of the present report, terms like "adult education" or "life-long education"—though internationally important—would be too wide, for they go far beyond the present concern of offering a foundation of skills, with literacy as its core, to those whom primary school provisions have failed to reach.[2]

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1. Modern concepts of literacy skills see these skills as continuous rather than as fixed levels of mastery. Still, it is useful to regard a certain level of fluency in reading and writing as "basic" in the sense that its attainment greatly facilitates the further development of these skills, even if any clear threshold is hard to identify. Among literacy specialists there is currently strong interest in skills which are task and situation specific—the many "literacies." Obviously, being able to read a simple passage of familiar words may not be sufficient to enable a person to operate a bank account. But there is also a common denominator of skills involved in reading and writing, and these skills will be of special importance because it is their applicability to a wide variety of situations that make them "basic" in the sense that they are a base upon which diverse other activities and further learning can build.

2. In African countries using French as their official language, "*education de base non formelle*" is often used about programs targeting out-of-school youth and/or unschooled youth.

4

The Importance of Adult Basic Education in Africa

For governments and international and bilateral agencies, the foremost objective for investment in the education sector is to provide basic education for all. The main instrument for that is primary schooling—with "children of school age" as the target group. But primary schools have never been defined as the only instrument. The Jomtien conference, which established international consensus around the objective of Education For All, also pointed to the importance of including adults and out-of-school youth who had been missed by primary school. Since Jomtien, the importance of reaching this group has become even more evident in most Sub-Saharan African countries. In spite of efforts made to expand access to primary school, and substantial increases in absolute enrollments, the gross enrollment ratio in primary education in Africa did not on the whole improve during the 1980–97 period. Large numbers have been of "school-going age" without going to school—or if they have been to school, then not long enough to have acquired basic literacy skills—and they have entered adulthood as illiterates. [1] The need to respond to demand for basic education from these illiterate and semi-literate adults was explicitly recognized at the April 2000 World Conference on Education in Dakar.

The population of illiterates in different African countries is not precisely estimated, and any estimate will depend on the degree of mastery of the written word which one would require for "literacy." Table 1 gives the most recent estimates from UNESCO. Countries are listed in descending order by estimated illiteracy rate for the population aged fifteen and above. These estimates are very loose.

Out of these forty-one countries, fifteen have an estimated illiteracy rate above 50 percent. Conversely, only thirteen countries have succeeded in reducing the illiteracy rate to 25 percent or less of the adult population. Illiterate youth are a special concern. In the panel to the right in Table 1, it can be seen that among these forty-one countries, there are four countries in which most youth aged fifteen to twenty-four are illiterate. Conversely, about two-fifths of the countries would—according to this measure, have succeeded in reducing youth illiteracy to less than 20 percent. What can be safely concluded is that illiteracy is very widespread among both younger and older adults in the countries which are found in the "top half" of the list.

Of all these countries for which data are presented, only in Botswana and Lesotho do men have a higher illiteracy rate than do women—among people aged fifteen and more. Some progress has been made in recent decades towards better representation of girls in the schools of other countries, thus improving female literacy rates among the younger adults (aged fifteen-twenty-four). In the panel to the right, the percentages show a higher literacy rate among females than males in this younger age group, in Lesotho and—strikingly so—in Botswana, Swaziland, and Namibia. South Africa and Mauritius show parity. In Zimbabwe and Cameroon there is only one percentage point's difference.

Obviously, as the overall illiteracy rate approaches zero, the difference between males and females will necessarily diminish. But it is also striking that the relative disadvantage of females is greater in countries with very high illiteracy rates, than in countries with moderate rates. Thus, where the overall need is the

Table 1
Estimated illiteracy rate and illiterate population aged 15 years and over, and 15 to 24 years old. Year 2000. Sub-Saharan African countries.

	Population aged 15 years and over						Population aged 15 years to 24					
	Illiteracy rate (percent)			Illiterate population (000)			Illiteracy rate (percent)			Illiterate population (000)		
Country	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
Niger	86	80	93	5 220	2 050	3 170	73	63	83	1 685	806	880
Burkina Faso	80	74	86	5 280	2 501	3 780	68	55	80	1 500	694	805
Namibia	15	10	21	204	216	325	10	10	21	30	33	55
Sierra Leone	69	58	80	1 222	497	1 000	..	..	..	..	..	..
Benin	59	46	72	2 660	1 200	1 460	50	39	60	802	181	480
Guinea-Bissau	53	33	73	305	165	220	35	20	51	102	38	66
Senegal	53	41	65	3 230	1 300	1 931	50	41	60	807	220	587
Ethiopia	61	50	72	30 500	9 400	33 100	55	50	60	8 500	2 700	5 800
Mali	70	60	80	5 650	1 955	2 660	56	50	62	800	335	455
Mauritania	60	50	61	810	227	582	52	50	61	205	115	151
Guinea	60	50	66	3 100	816	1 222	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mozambique	60	50	66	5 101	2 100	5 000	50	50	60	1 650	405	1 020
CAR	55	36	65	1 113	305	813	52	25	60	200	55	104
Côte d'Ivoire	60	50	60	5 800	1 900	2 800	50	50	61	1 110	005	005
Burundi	50	50	50	1 660	300	1 110	20	20	30	005	210	200
Djibouti	50	50	50	100	50	110	..	..	..	..	..	..
Liberia	50	50	50	005	200	502	21	15	50	205	50	100
Chad	50	50	50	1 000	600	1 200	..	..	..	..	..	..
Comoros	50	50	61	105	52	102	61	50	50	61	50	50
Sudan	50	50	50	5 600	2 000	5 000	25	17	50	1 400	600	500
Togo	50	50	50	1 000	341	502	50	15	35	004	50	104
Malawi	50	50	50	5 200	515	1 552	20	10	50	005	202	512
Nigeria	50	50	50	50 200	5 000	10 100	10	10	10	5 200	1 100	5 200
Rwanda	50	50	50	1 300	535	001	10	10	10	005	110	101
Uganda	50	50	50	5 505	1 200	2 501	21	10	50	010	015	005
Ghana	50	50	50	5 000	1 100	2 200	11	5	10	000	100	200
Gabon	50	50	50	015	55	102	..	..	..	..	..	..
Cape Verde	50	10	50	60	10	50	10	5	10	11	5	5
Cameroon	50	10	61	5 000	200	1 000	5	5	5	005	00	110
Zimbabwe	50	10	50	5 001	1 501	5 100	5	5	10	000	225	512
Botswana	50	50	50	015	110	00	10	10	5	50	50	10
Namibia	50	15	50	1 000	220	210	10	5	10	005	00	105
Swaziland	20	10	21	110	51	50	5	10	5	10	10	5
Congo	15	15	50	005	50	510	5	5	5	10	5	5
Kenya	15	11	10	5 510	000	2 000	5	5	5	001	100	201
Namibia	10	10	10	101	50	50	5	10	5	50	10	11
Equatorial Guinea	10	5	50	50	5	50	5	5	5	5	5	1
Lesotho	10	50	5	005	105	50	5	10	5	50	50	5
Mauritius	10	10	10	105	55	50	5	5	5	10	5	5
South Africa	10	10	10	5 510	1 010	2 100	5	5	5	000	500	000
Zimbabwe	5	5	10	000	105	205	1	5	1	10	5	10

Source: UNESCO's Statistical Base Year 1999-2000. Literate: "Being able to read and write with understanding a short simple statement of his/her everyday life". Estimates based on census data which is two to seven years old. Where no census data are available. Literacy figure's assistance in preparing the presentation of this table is appreciated.

greatest, women will also stand out more as the most important target group.

Primary education for children must remain the main means for moving towards Education For All in African countries. But many countries in Africa will not have achieved universal primary education by year 2015, even if they were to achieve enrollment increases several times the annual increases achieved during 1985-95 (cf. Figure 14 in Carceles and Fredriksen [forthcoming]). It can also be shown that primary school expansion, even at a greatly increased pace, will in many countries not have sufficed to achieve the target of reducing adult illiteracy to "one-half the 1990 level by 2005" (Figure 15 in Carceles and Fredriksen [forthcoming]). There is a clear need for a two-pronged strategy in many African countries if Education For All in the foreseeable future is to remain a credible target: continue the development of primary education and at the same time offer opportunities for those who actively demand basic education among adults who were missed by primary school.

The case for a two-pronged strategy for African countries with low school enrollment rates, rather than concentrating all available resources for basic education on primary school, is further strengthened because provisions for adults are also helpful for the development of primary schooling. As will be shown below, a consistently documented effect of adult basic education is that participants give stronger support to their children's schooling.

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1. See Table 1.1 in World Bank (2000) *A Chance to Learn: Knowledge and Finance for Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*. That table draws upon several UNESCO sources.

5

World Bank-supported ABE in Sub-Saharan Africa

At present World Bank helps finance implementation of ABE programs in Ghana, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. As of spring 2000, in at least six other Sub-Saharan African countries, there was preparation or active exploration of investments in ABE with some Bank financing. In several cases this occurs as part of the preparation of support for education sector investment programs. In two cases (Uganda, Mozambique) the involvement has initially taken the form of an evaluation of the performance of existing provisions, as a first step in the development of new strategies for ABE. Apart from country specific activities, the Africa Region of the Bank has also financed two international workshops. The BELOISYA project of the World Bank organized a workshop in Chad in March 1999 for eleven countries, with the aim of sharing knowledge about strategies and implementation of ABE. The present report, as well as concurrent work by Oxenham and Aoki (2001), makes use of knowledge generated by the BELOISYA project. In 2000 another major regional activity was a two-phase workshop in Dakar for participants from eleven West African countries, conducted in French, on the Evaluation and Monitoring of Adult Basic Education programs.

The recent growing ABE activity within the World Bank's Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Department has occurred against a background characterized by low investment in ABE for two decades. A case for further regeneration of investments in ABE necessitates an analysis of the earlier decline and a reexamination of arguments that in the past have been used to caution against investment in ABE.

6

Years in the Wilderness

In spite of the targets concerning education for out-of-school youth and adults, which were set at the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 at Jomtien, Thailand, it would appear that the strong case which then was made for developing primary education has served to crowd out investments in basic education for adults in the 1990s—although ABE was part of the targets set at Jomtien. Within budgets for recurrent expenditure made tight by structural adjustment policies, education ministries in many countries have prioritized primary schools. External funding agencies, which in many countries were the main source of financing for adult literacy education in earlier decades, have had an especially strong commitment to primary education; and governments have been hard pressed to find the funds required to keep primary teachers paid. Under the circumstances it was fairly easy to let ABE be quietly scaled down, for ABE was weakly institutionalized to begin with—in contrast to schools with their permanent buildings and staff.

But caution towards investments in ABE antedates Jomtien. Three criticisms of ABE have stalled support for ABE: claims of high rates of non-completion among those who enrolled in programs, ABE's association with politicized campaigns, and—in early World Bank nonformal education project components—difficulty of implementation.

Prior to Jomtien, certain reviews of adult literacy education had dampened interest in ABE. It was widely noted that UNESCO's attempt in the late 1960s and early 1970s to support implementation of work-related "functional" literacy programs in a number of countries showed weak performance. Only a modest minority of those who initially enrolled in the functional literacy courses would complete the course. The following are some rough ratios of persons passing examinations of basic literacy to the number initially enrolled in the same functional literacy courses, as calculated from figures reported in UNDP (1976:174): Tanzania, 20 percent; Iran, 14 percent; Ethiopia, 25 percent; Ecuador, 23 percent; Sudan, 8 percent.

In a field where empirical research on efficiency has been sparse, these early pessimistic reports of poor internal efficiency have in some instances been carried over as pessimistic assumptions in more recent publications (Abadzi 1994). Two major studies carried out by IIEP in Kenya (Carron *et al.* 1989) and Tanzania (Carr-Hill *et al.* 1991) documented a beneficial impact among those who had been made literate, but also showed declining implementation activity in the 1980s as the campaign approach was running out of steam in these two countries. All along, the data on actual completion rates have been meager. But pessimism based upon experience of the 1970s has been sustained longer than justified (see Chapter 9) simply because there was no attempt (until Oxenham and Aoki 2000) to conduct a comprehensive and updated review of "internal efficiency."

A less manifest reason for the earlier decline of ABE is that several of its internationally most visible examples were tied to regimes which had embarked upon an internal crusade-like campaign in order to convert the adult population to their particular One-Party vision of a modern future. In some quarters, the extent of support for ABE came to reflect the extent of identification with or opposition to such regimes. At

present, if these regimes have not collapsed, then they are no longer crusading. The strongly "statist" type of crusading ABE that was part of such regimes now seems relegated to history. But all along, there have also been other major forms of ABE run by governments or NGOs, which have not been contentiously politicized.

In the World Bank caution about adult literacy education came as a reaction to excessive embrace of "nonformal education" in the late 1970s. A review by Romain and Armstrong (1987) of World Bank projects and project components up to 1984 served to sustain caution because they found that many of these planned activities had not been adequately implemented, and that they often had been scaled down or dropped. The review left the impression that nonformal education projects (and hence also literacy education) which were part of some projects) were fraught with implementation problems. Within the World Bank, following sharply declining investment in ABE in the early 1980s (Eisemon *et al.* 1999), there was little interest in ABE.

However, it should be noted that only two of the ninety-two projects reviewed by Romain and Armstrong were free standing nonformal education projects. In most cases, the nonformal education activity was a minor component of a project focused on objectives other than education and training. In two-thirds of the projects, less than 10 percent of the project budgets had been assigned for components concerned with nonformal education. These components had been strongly promoted by the Bank and local ownership was weak. At the time when the bulk of these projects had been planned, Bank policy favored nonformal education strongly, but the clients commonly wanted projects supporting formal schooling. The fact that in most cases nonformal education was only a minor project component made it vulnerable in such circumstances. Under fiscal constraints, the nonformal component was often not implemented at all or it was reduced in favor of formal education.

Romain and Armstrong proposed a remedy for poor implementation (but this has been less heeded than the caution induced by their observation that implementation was weak): that *this type of education should be given attention in its own right and that the Bank should respond to demand*, rather than following "an overly casual approach to tacking [nonformal education and training] components onto projects without providing sufficient project funding or without assurance of country commitment" (p vii). They noted that in the few projects where project planning had been attentive to the need for local ownership and to effective demand from the target group, implementation had gone well.

Romain and Armstrong (p. 21) found that "it is difficult to establish the determinants of success, limited success and failure in the literacy components." But very little information existed about the success of these literacy components in the project documentation they surveyed—*and they did not comment at all on retention rates, learning outcomes, or impact.* In the absence of evaluations which could adequately document the extent of ABE's learning outcomes and impact, and which could track implementation under more favorable conditions than what pertained in the projects covered by Romain and Armstrong, a weakly-founded "impression of failure" has probably served to sustain skepticism towards ABE among those officials and agency staff who have lacked personal familiarity with ABE projects.

With regard to primary schools, high rates of non-completion are used as urgent reasons for improving the quality of education. In the case of ABE, the claims of low completion, of weak project implementation—or simply the lack of information about learning outcomes—have not in a similar way served to add urgency to the need for a stronger engagement in order to achieve improvement. Somehow, in conjunction with often limited government commitment, it was felt that if ABE was thought to be "difficult" to develop, then one should assign it low priority.

The present review will argue that it is time to pull ABE out of the "wilderness" because a look at findings now available, gives a decidedly more optimistic view of the efficiency and impact of ABE than did those earlier reviews upon which pessimistic conclusions were based.

7

Reasons for Renewed Interest

One reason why there is now rising interest in ABE is the special relevance it has for contemporary agency strategies of support for poverty reduction. ABE is self-targeted upon the poor, and there has been a steady accumulation of research findings showing that ABE improves the capacity of participants to act with confidence in larger, more public social arenas (cf. Chapter 8). Civil society can also be more directly strengthened when support is given to community based NGOs (CBOs[1]) as ABE providers. Political change towards democratic government opens up ABE policies that stress partnership with NGOs.

Viewing basic education as a human right places a special obligation upon governments to make great efforts to safeguard this right.[2] As noted, it will take many decades in those countries where the school enrollment rate is the lowest before the overall rate of adult illiteracy in the population can be substantially reduced by expansion in primary schooling. Taking this into account, the April 2000 World Education Conference at Dakar gave new importance to adult literacy education. Thus, ABE has been given clear support within renewed Education For All policies.

Above all, there is now better documentation than in the past, about how basic education as acquired by adults helps to improve the conditions of life for the participants and their families as well as for the children of these adults (see Chapter 8). For example, it has become increasingly evident that ABE is a powerful support for primary education because literate parents (especially mothers) will send their children to school more often and give stronger support to the children's learning (8). This means that adult basic education and primary schooling for children work together to advance Education For All.

It will also be shown that the internal efficiency of ABE courses, according to the most recently available evidence, is much better than what was the case in the days of all-out literacy campaigns and mass programs (Chapter 9).

In the Sub-Saharan African region, the case for prioritizing ABE is especially strong. Primary school enrollments have remained low in many countries. In some countries sustained turmoil has led to large segments of the adult population having been denied primary education (Carceles & Fredriksen, [forthcoming]). ABE is especially appropriate for redressing gender inequity. In most countries, women are strongly over-represented in the illiterate adult population. Yet, with very few country exceptions (Chad is one), women are over-represented among ABE participants. Even in Botswana, a country where males outnumber females among adults who have "never been to school," most participants have been women (Gaborone *et al.* 1987:10-11).

In addition to these reasons why ABE *should* be on the agenda for development assistance, there is reason to expect that ABE increasingly *will* be part of the agenda for discussions between governments and the

World Bank. In an increasing number of countries such discussions now occur in the framework of sector-wide approaches. This means that a funding agency must take a holistic view. In addition, a client-centered approach is important to the World Bank. This means that, if a government wishes to include ABE among the forms of education to be supported within a sector-wide approach, the Bank must stand ready to engage positively with government about how best to support this sub-sector.

1. Community-Based Organizations—a term introduced to remind us that many NGOs don't have much of a community base.
2. It is recognized that basic education will compete for limited resources with other entitlements which are strongly justified as "rights"—e.g., basic health services.

8

Evidence of Impact

To assess impact, one should ideally follow up ABE "graduates" over a long period. Since long-term follow-up research is rare in studies on effects of ABE, the research base may understate effects that also require other inputs and opportunities beyond ABE before they make themselves felt, and it may exaggerate the importance of effects which occur soon but wear off quickly.

Usually only short-term effects are traced. For some questions this is appropriate (e.g., does ABE make participants take a stronger interest in their children's schooling?) Other short-term effects may have uncertain sustainability (e.g., the boost to one's self-esteem after successfully completing a course). Still other effects may need time before they appear. For example, improved income may not be achieved overnight as a result of skills acquired from ABE—just as economic effects of skills acquired in formal schooling are best assessed by information on income streams over a lifetime (though ABE effects on income should occur sooner than income effects of primary schooling).

Research relevant for assessing ABE's learning outcomes and the impact on the lives of the participants tends to focus on literacy and numeracy—a limitation reflected in the scope of the present review. Elements other than literacy alone are important parts of ABE (at the same time as the contents of these other elements will be strongly context dependent). But research on the impact of literacy is highly relevant for assessing the benefits of ABE since literacy is the one element which different ABE programs share, and it is usually the dominant part. What research evidence is there with regard to beneficial impact when literacy is acquired by people participating in adult education?

Literate mothers support children's education

Findings consistently support the conclusion that when mothers become literate, they will do more to back up their children's schooling—and especially their daughters' education. This means that ABE and primary schooling have complementary effects, with synergy between investment in primary schooling and investment in ABE. It is therefore misleading merely to see the two kinds of education as competing in their claims on scarce resources.

The importance for children's education of having a literate mother is supported by studies that have tracked ABE participants over time. With regard to ActionAid's REFLECT project, this effect was especially pronounced in Uganda (Archer and Cottingham 1996:ii). According to a recent large-scale study by Okech *et al.* (1999:66) of both REFLECT and the government's Functional Adult Literacy Program, to be better able to back up one's children's schooling is one of the reasons that participants in Uganda commonly give for joining adult literacy.[1] A comparison of illiterates and "graduates" of the Ugandan literacy courses showed that the latter were more than twice as likely as the former to report that they discussed school work with their children and that they checked their children's homework (Okech *et al.* 1999:154).[2]

In Nepal, Burchfield's study (1997:107) reports increased support for children's schooling among mothers who had been made literate. A USAID team led by Sharon Benoliel (USAID 1998:10) reported on earlier research in Nepal that also showed that "women who have completed literacy programs become more

deeply engaged in supporting their children's education in various ways." Cawthera's (1997:76) study in Bangladesh similarly observes that children become more likely to start going to school when parents (or older siblings) attend literacy classes. With regard to Ghana, Korboe (1997:33) reports findings of a similar kind—e.g., that teachers say children of "literacy learners" are more punctual, more regular attenders, and appear better groomed. The positive impact on children's education means that ABE can be a useful part of the strategy for improving access and quality in primary schools, especially in a country's most under-served areas. Using ABE to reach parents could also be a means to involve parents more in the affairs of the school.

Empowerment

A long-standing observation about popular education is that it transforms people from passive subjects to active citizens. In contemporary societies it is generally the case that more educated persons take a more active part in civic life and in politics than those with little or no education.[3] Popular education has historically been closely interrelated with the growth of broadly based representative democracy in many countries. *Adult* education has had especially strong connections with the growth of broadly based civil society—the range of interest groups and other voluntary organizations which mediate between ordinary individual citizens and the state, or which serve the instrumental and expressive goals of the members of voluntary associations. One example among many would be the form of training for local leadership in the popular movements in the Nordic countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Drawing especially upon South Asian experience, Saldanha (2000) has pointed to the interrelations between basic education, capacity for local civic participation, and poverty alleviation. Among his illustrations of these interrelations are the SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) project in India, and savings and credit schemes such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. These cases illustrate how sustainable and large-scale poverty alleviation can emerge by strengthened organization of civil society, with basic education as an important empowering input.[4]

If political participation of a certain kind is directly promoted by the contents of ABE, one would expect a correlation between exposure to ABE and such participation. In Kenya, the importance of taking part in elections was stressed in a literacy program, and an effect of the program has reportedly been to increase the frequency of voting. In general, literacy program graduates in Kenya scored systematically better than a control group of illiterates from the same localities on a wide variety of behavioral and attitudinal indicators that included participation in elections and in local associations, according to Carron *et al.* (1989:173) who sampled 371 literacy graduates and a control group of 66 illiterates in 5 different locations.

Civic participation depends on many conditions, and it would be unrealistic to expect ABE to suffice regardless of context. In some cases ABE learners live in social conditions which greatly constrain the possibility that they can become active participants in the larger civic or public arenas. One example would be the women participants in REFLECT's literacy circles on Bhola island in Bangladesh, whose public status was one of extreme subservience to men (Archer and Cottingham 1996:58). In this case ABE improved the participants' confidence and sense of self-efficacy for action within the household, but not enough to involve the women in any civic participation. Thus, it is only if this improvement goes *far enough*, and if opportunities for civic participation allow it, that ABE leads to participation in interest groups.

Improved self-confidence among women in strongly male-dominated societies is among the more consistently documented immediate outcomes of ABE. Various terms are used to describe this phenomenon: "empowerment," "confidence," "self-esteem," "self-efficacy." In a recent review of the literature on literacy education in relation to empowerment and behavior, Moulton (1997) points to a series of small-scale studies, all of which document various "empowerment" effects.

In summing up experience from adult literacy activities internationally, Lind (1997) similarly observes that individual empowerment effects are both strong and well documented, and that ABE is a means by which women can take more charge of their conditions of life.

Increased individual empowerment may not be *equally* the case for all forms of ABE. More participatory approaches should better facilitate such effects than approaches which treat adults as passive "pupils." A current promising development of participatory methods of ABE is ActionAid's REFLECT. Some commentators, especially those working with conflict theory as a framework for their analysis, argue that whether literacy (or education in schools, for that matter) will enable the poor and powerless to improve their conditions will crucially depend on what is taught and how teaching is conducted (e.g., Stromquist 1999:271-276, Mehran 1999). However, this association, which one would expect on theoretical grounds with *type* of pedagogy, is yet to be empirically documented. Meanwhile, the seemingly robust finding is that some improved sense of personal efficacy/empowerment results from quite diverse types of ABE pedagogy.

A number of specific studies have detected this type of change. In Ghana, Korboe (1997) concluded that "esteem building is a consistent outcome of the literacy program." In Namibia, Lind (1996:88) notes from the evaluation of the national literacy campaign that the acquisition of literacy led to greater self-esteem, and to more self-confidence in speaking up at public meetings. Burchfield (1997:107) reports from Nepal that the women who participated in literacy education showed increased confidence in stating their opinions to their families and in the community, and that there were effects on "discussing things heard on radio, how to keep men from drinking, how to prevent men from beating wives...more confidence in taking the bus." A wider range of evaluations in Nepal has been reviewed by USAID (1998:2), which concludes that "Armed with ideas, confidence, and information acquired during literacy classes, participants have slowly begun to assume more autonomy and to claim more authority within their domains. They have increased their participation in collective community activities and social issues, and they have begun to engage in improved health practices."

There are other similar reports: "As a result of the 'Women's Enterprise Management Training' in India, many of the women who participated in the program reportedly became more self-confident and more involved in in-group decision-making...they increased their intervention in community associations" (Diagne 1999:14). In Burkina Faso, improvement towards a less subservient position for women in relation to men was found to be an important effect of the project *L'Alphabétisation des Femmes* (Diagne 1999:14). In Bangladesh, Cawthera (1997:50-53) reports improved self-confidence and self-esteem as an outcome of participation in the Nijera Shikhi literacy movement. Similar "confidence gains" are among the frequent mentions which literacy course participants in Uganda (Okech *et al.* 1999:151,157) make in response to open-ended questions relating to advantages from literacy. In 1999, the team evaluating the University of South Africa's adult basic education program in three provinces, was told by some learners that they went to literacy classes "to overcome shyness" and others reported that the classes enabled them to communicate better with other people.[5] There is a connection between these two kinds of impact: confidence is essential for effective communication with others.

More effective communication—oral as well as written

Some researchers (e.g., Olson 1999) argue that by making language an object of knowledge in its own right, literacy (whether acquired in school or in ABE) affects the way we think. There is some evidence that the acquisition of the literacy part of ABE can make people more effective at oral communication.

In a study from three sites and districts in Nepal, Comings *et al.* (1998) obtained findings consistent with the idea that literacy improves a person's skills in "decontextualized" language use. This would mean that a person becomes more effective at communicating when there is not much shared context with the person to whom one is speaking. One becomes better able to perceive and respond to the listener's information needs, more able to explain oneself when this is necessary for effective communication. In Mexico, Dexter *et al.* (1998) also found a connection between ability to read and skills at decontextualized oral communication in a small-scale study on the connection between mother's education and children's health. From Ghana, Korboe (1997:43) has reported that adult literacy learners are more orally articulate than those who have not joined the literacy program.

There must be corroboration from studies with larger samples and more stringent controls; but these findings agree with the conclusion that ABE enables

people to move with ease and confidence in a wider range of social situations. The sense of improved personal efficacy, discussed above, may in part stem from such improved skills of "more public" expression.

Improved family health

Literate adults are healthier and raise healthier children. The special importance of *women's* literacy in this regard has been recognized for some time. Reviews (Jayne 1999, LeVine 1999:302) have pointed to a very substantial body of research on the relation between mother's education and infant/child health, which generally shows that more educated mothers use health and contraceptive services more, and more frequently adopt domestic practices favorable to child survival. The same type of benign relationship is found in research reviews that examine indicators of family health and hygiene among literate as compared to illiterate mothers. Literate mothers are more likely to have their children vaccinated, to know about oral rehydration, to provide better nutrition and to space their pregnancies (Bown 1990, Comings 1995).

It can be argued that such correlation based upon cross-sections of the adult population will mainly show effects of primary education, not necessarily effects of adult education. But with regard to knowledge and skills whose direct application is needed for improving one particular aspect of conditions of life (e.g., the importance of precautions against diseases), there is reason to expect more immediate effects of ABE than in the case of primary school. Bown (1990:13) argues: "The time-span after which attitude and behaviour change might be seen could be shorter, since the women are already fulfilling adult roles in society and are in a position to apply their learning at once"—especially when adult education is consciously aimed at changing attitudes and behavior.

There is also a series of studies which examine health effects/correlates that can be specifically identified with having participated in ABE, as distinct from having acquired literacy from primary school. In Bangladesh, Cawthera (1997:53) found improved family health to be a direct result of ABE in his qualitative study of the Nijera Shikhi literacy movement. Large-scale surveys, with stringent statistical controls, which examine *ABE* effects on health—as distinct from effects of regular schooling—are hard to find because most surveys of health in relation to literacy or educational background do not ask questions about participation in ABE programs. The study by Carron *et al.* (1989:173) in Kenya reported more use of modern family planning methods among adult literacy program graduates in Kenya than among the control group of illiterates—but more than half of these literacy graduates also had had some prior exposure to primary schooling, so that literacy course effects could possibly be confounded with some primary school effects.

There is one large-scale study that reinforces the positive conclusions regarding beneficial impact on health, and that has used very stringent controls for possible effects of prior exposure to primary schooling. In Nicaragua, Sandiford *et al.* (1995:5) conducted a large-scale survey which tracked ABE effects over time, comparing these with effects of primary school. Women who had been part of the 1980 adult literacy campaign (excluding those who had ever been to school) were compared some ten years later with those of similar socio-economic status who had not been part of that campaign. A statistically significant drop in infant mortality over time was found among those who had participated in ABE. They also found that the drop associated with having been made literate in primary school was even greater. They concluded that the reduced-mortality effect of ABE appears to be "equivalent to about two years of formal schooling...could be greater."

One reason why ABE programs can be effective in teaching health and hygiene-related skills is that these topics are staple elements in functional adult literacy approaches, along with livelihood-related activities. For example, the 1999 evaluation of functional adult literacy education in Uganda (Okech *et al.*, 1999, Chapter 7) showed, under the rubric of "improved family care," that participants reported a range of such practices—e.g., digging a pit latrine and keeping it clean, digging a rubbish pit, putting a rack up for utensils, boiling water, washing hands, covering foods.

Aside from the direct effects that message contents will have, LeVine (1999) argues that the connection between literacy and health is so strong and pervasive that it is probably mainly due to the improved communication skills which literacy gives people—not only in formulating their own messages but also in understanding both written and oral messages from others.

More productive livelihoods

Literacy and numeracy are directly useful skills in market transactions. In practically any study which asks neo-literates to state "advantages" or "benefits" from becoming literate (and numerate), there will be some mention of no longer being so easily cheated or manipulated in the market place. Being able to check other people's prices and measures is clearly helpful, and being able better to handle measurement opens a wider range of possible employment or self-employment—for example, dress-making, jobbing, carpentry.

In addition to these tangible skills, the confidence and sense of self-efficacy which ABE gives are traits of entrepreneurship.

Without literacy, micro-entrepreneurs in the informal economy are at a severe disadvantage. This conclusion is supported by experience from a Grassroots Management Training (GMT) and Outreach program which has been developed for women micro-entrepreneurs in Burkina Faso, Senegal, Nigeria, Malawi, Tanzania, Mauritania, Mali, Morocco and Tunisia (as well as in three Indian states) under the leadership of Jerri Dell at the World Bank Institute. The evaluation of this program in Burkina Faso (Filion and Renaud 1997:37-38) notes that the program had been designed so that literacy would not be required of the participants because it sought to cater to illiterate and semi-literate women entrepreneurs. But the participants asked that literacy skills be included, and it became evident that literacy made it considerably easier to learn the management skills. Similar conclusions are reached in evaluations of the same project in other countries. Being able to keep records rather than relying on memory, and being able to check calculations of prices and measures, enables an entrepreneur to cope with more complex transactions. Being able to advance from literacy in a local language to literacy in a language which has a wider currency (e.g., the official language), can enable traders to extend their dealings over a wider geographical range.

In the 1999 evaluation of adult literacy education in Uganda (Okech *et al.*, 1999: 148) the specific advantage of "not being cheated" was volunteered by 15 percent of 709 literacy course "graduates" to an open-ended question about benefits from literacy.

In a large scale survey in Kenya (Carron *et al.* 1989:173), it was found that more literate farmers scored higher on the use of hybrid seeds. Similar results were obtained in Tanzania by Carr-Hill *et al.* (1991:324) who concluded that "The main effect which may be attributable to literacy is the spreading of modern agricultural techniques in the rural areas"—a findings which in this case was based upon the report given by farmers themselves of how they had come to adopt more modern techniques.

Cawthera (1997:48-55) reports increases in cash income and in various physical outputs by learners who have been literate by the Nijera Shikhi literacy movement in Bangladesh. Another study which reports change in economic behavior is the "Women's Enterprise Management Training" in India (referred to in Diagne 1999:14). In the Indian project, literacy teaching was combined with practical skills, teaching, and access to credit.

In their evaluation of ActionAid's REFLECT projects in Uganda, El Salvador, and Bangladesh, Archer and Cottingham (1996:36) also provide some examples of how ABE had enabled people to make more productive use of available resources.[6] A more recent and larger scale evaluation of the government's functional literacy program in Uganda reports an impressive range of practical livelihood-related projects which have been initiated as part of the functional literacy work.[7] About five-eights of the surveyed ABE graduates reported that they had been involved in such projects—each learner mentioned on the average two projects (Okech *et al.* 1999, Chapter 7). The economic value and sustainability of these activities are not known, but two-thirds of the literacy graduates said they had generated some cash through their participation in these projects; in other cases the income would be in kind.

Apart from the predominantly qualitative research reviewed above, the case for economic benefits from ABE hinges at present on how closely the benefits from ABE would resemble benefits from literacy that have been acquired in mainstream schooling. Both types of benefit would accrue over time, as skills will be deployed in response to opportunities that present themselves. It would be unrealistic to expect much short term income gain from acquiring literacy unless ABE itself includes income generating activities and is connected with access to credit. At the same time, organizational integration of literacy education with rural credit has grave risks. The competence required to mount micro-credit programs and locally to manage them is quite different from what it takes to run literacy courses, and vice versa.

Since ABE learners are older than school children and closer to the productive prime in their life cycle, one might expect an impact on income *sooner* than in the case of primary and secondary schooling. In fact, in the case of schooling, the delay of effects on income is so obvious that research designs would lack credibility if they look for economic impact only in the first few years after the completion of school. Long-term follow-up is ideally needed to assess ABE effects on income. This has not yet been done. But as in the case of research on the economic effects of schooling, cross sectional surveys can be used to generate information upon which more tentative conclusions can be based.

In the absence of such research, there is no reason to assume that the economic returns to ABE, discounted to their present value, would be inferior to those associated with primary schooling. True, the older the learners are, the more the present value of gains in life-income will be reduced by a shorter remaining working life. On the other hand, effects on productivity can occur sooner when the skills are acquired during adulthood. Also, ABE learners are usually young adults (typically aged less than thirty-five), and benefit streams in the short and medium term add much more to discounted present value than do benefit streams in the remote future. Furthermore, self-selection to ABE by persons of unusual determination to "improve themselves" will produce positive interaction effects on income and livelihood if such learners *make better use* of what they have learned than what non-participants would have done had they been induced to take part in ABE through a mass approach. Thus, Windham (1999:343) speculates that economic benefits of literacy will include benign synergies of skills acquisition and other characteristics of persons who strive to become literate.

Attempts to quantify economic benefits and separating out those that derive from literacy acquired in ABE, rather than primary school, remain a challenge to the economics of education. Characteristically, the review article by Windham (1999) is rich in hypotheses about the benign economic impacts attributed to literacy but gives scant guidance to findings on income effects of *adult* literacy education. A major comparative study on this theme is needed.[8]

Effects of ABE in 'the North'

Adult education has played a special part in the historical growth of voluntary organizations associated with the development of a broadly based democracy in countries in the North.[9] For example, in the late nineteenth century, residential courses in the Scandinavian folk high schools which gave a liberal education of some months duration, played an important part in educating people from "common folk background" for leadership roles and in building social networks among prospective leaders. Adult education associations using local "study circles" and distance education techniques is another Nordic example from the early decades of the twentieth century.

In countries where the vast majority of adults have been literate for several generations, one would expect *not* being literate to be a more distinct disadvantage than it is in countries with low literacy rates, simply because literacy is assumed in so many aspects of mainstream social and economic life. On the other hand, once acquired, literacy in the North will be more easily sustained and further developed because it will benefit from being more easily reinforced by a highly literate environment.

There is ample evidence demonstrating the advantage of literacy and numeracy in OECD countries. A recent large-scale survey (OECD 1995) in twelve countries, has shown that an adult person's *extent* of literacy (as measured by tests) is strongly associated with positive economic life chances and with indicators of well-being more generally.

In the North too, there is some evidence supporting the view that literacy improves communication in areas not directly connected with reading and writing. A small-scale study by Stauffer *et al.* (1978) in Boston, USA found a positive association between the reading level among adults and the ability to recall and use information from television news. As in the case of countries in the South, such "benign correlates" of literacy will only be weak evidence about the effects of literacy as acquired by *adult* learners. But other research on such learners points in a similar direction. Beder (1999: 108-116) has recently done a review in the USA of twenty-three studies of adult basic education, which satisfied certain minimum requirements as to methodological stringency (selected from sixty-eight studies which included information on the outcomes or impact of adult literacy education). Among the investigations with relevant data, most studies showed gains in employment and earnings. The studies also showed that ABE participants became more supportively involved in their children's education, that ABE had positive influences on the participant's

own continued education, and that the participants reported improved self-esteem. Thus, the findings show a mix of gains that is similar to studies in the South.

Impact of ABE or self-selection effects?

The findings above show that ABE is associated with a range of good outcomes, the best documented ones are empowerment and enhanced support for children's education. As in the case of other forms of education, some uncertainty remains about how far these associations could be due to selection or self-selection of persons with initial personal characteristics which also affect outcomes in a positive manner.

In practice, the clientele of ABE is usually a combination of illiterate and semi-literate persons. One should therefore take account of prior exposure to schooling when assessing learning outcomes of ABE programs. A major discovery in the large-scale evaluation of the functional literacy program in Uganda, and in the comparison of that program with ActionAid's REFLECT program (Okech *et al.* 1999) was the high proportion (three-quarters) of ABE participants who had some prior exposure to primary schooling. Since REFLECT had attracted a higher proportion than the government's program of persons who had spent some time in school earlier, adjusting for prior exposure to school turned out to be crucial for an accurate comparison of learning outcomes from these two programs.

Information on baseline conditions—e.g., skills and knowledge before participation in ABE—make it possible to track impact over time for the same persons. Such research designs are rare in large-scale research on outcomes and impact of education—not just in research on ABE. However, there is a large-scale investigation on ABE that followed this stringent research design—namely, the investigation by Sandiford *et al.* (1995) from Nicaragua. So, it is especially noteworthy that this study documented the beneficial impact of ABE for mothers in terms of their children's health.

As to positive self-selection to ABE by those who are especially motivated, it is clearly a pedagogic advantage. It is easier to work with a positively self-select group; and strong motivation is important for being able to complete an ABE course. [10]

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1. By far the most common reason given is simply the wish to learn to read and write, improving one's knowledge, personal knowledge etc.—not any particularly utilitarian reason.
2. However, the percent sending their children to school (if they had children of school age) was strikingly high and much the same for these two groups (around 80 percent); it was only slightly higher for the literacy course graduates.
3. This is not to say that literacy or even long schooling is any guarantee of active citizenship (as low voter turnout in elections shows in some highly 'literate' countries).
4. Capacity to act together in pursuit of shared goals is one of the several aspects of "social capital."
5. Personal communication from Lalage Bown, who was evaluating the program.
6. REFLECT = Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques. See also Box 3.
7. The large majority of these projects in Uganda concern crop production, handicrafts, and animal husbandry/poultry keeping.
8. Iredale (1999:351) concludes that in order to generate findings which will have credibility with those agencies which, like the World Bank, attach special importance to cost-benefit analysis. "What is ... needed is a methodology, broadly accepted by economists and project managers in aid agencies, that can measure the economic returns to prospective literacy projects."
9. Nazi Germany shows of course that a highly literate populace is not a *sufficient* condition for good governance.
10. Self selection in favor of highly motivated persons applies also to other forms of non-compulsory schooling. But it is probably especially strongly felt in programs which cater to adults who will have many other important claims on their time other than "school." However, "controlling for" such positive personal characteristics (energy, motivation, ability) when assessing the impact of ABE would need to take account of interaction effects if Windham's (1999:343) is correct in arguing that there are benign synergy effects between literacy acquisition and the personal traits which may matter in self-selection to ABE.

9

Responding to Criticisms of ABE

Some critics of ABE have claimed that ABE has commonly suffered from poor efficiency—high dropouts and low retention of skills, so that such sustainable learning outcomes produced by ABE would not warrant the cost incurred in producing them. Recent evidence supports a decidedly more optimistic view.

Is internal efficiency too weak?

Over the last three decades, the profile of the type of programs has changed. "All-out campaigns" have been replaced by more demand-driven and more community-based approaches. Documentation about a wider range of ABE has become available and challenges the reputation of high drop-out rates, which adult literacy programs in some countries acquired in the 1970s.

First, regarding formal education, poor completion rates are not used as evidence for disinvestment—in spite of the extremely poor internal efficiency that the primary schools in some countries have had. Rather, low internal efficiency has been used to demonstrate the urgent need for improving quality. There is a *prima facie* case for applying the same logic to ABE.

Second, a high drop-out among those initially enrolled in ABE does not necessarily mean that a program is failing—unless one has unrealistic objectives of eradicating illiteracy regardless of whether illiterate persons are motivated or not. (Contemporary ABE programs have moved away from "eradication objectives" to objectives that stress social benefits for individuals). Precisely because of ABE's open and voluntary nature, attrition will be normal. Some participants may only come for the practical skills taught—e.g., better ways of collecting wild honey, new forms of animal husbandry, craft production—not for literacy skills and may never have planned to take any test or exam. Further, because of the novelty of ABE activities, in the sense of their being a special event in the village, they may initially attract participants who are only superficially interested (or normally too busy) and who drop out after a few weeks. If ABE becomes a major social event in a community, it can attract many participants with sustained motivation; but it will also attract well-wishers and on-lookers, with fluid boundaries between core participants and peripherals.

What matters more than the drop-out rate among those who initially enrolled is the completion rate among those who remain after an early exploratory period, and that there is a sufficiently large group of stable participants to make the course pedagogically viable and cost-effective. As Moulton[1] argues, the key question is whether a person's participation—for any length of time—helps improve the quality of his/her life or provide opportunities for further education or work. The main indicators of success should be *impact* and unit cost, either per "graduate" or per "enrollee"—not conventional measures of internal efficiency. It is important to look to impact, not only to individual learning outcomes when gauging effectiveness, for if ABE succeeds in building *groups* that work more effectively together for betterment of their living conditions, part of the benefit is in the form of social capital—not merely individual skills.

Third, if one does look to conventional measures of internal efficiency, there is in any case ground for optimism about ABE. As regards dropout, or failing to measure up to completion requirements, there is a great variation, both between programs and among different sites/regions within the same program and same country. But the "trend line" is much better than earlier pessimistic claims.

Oxenham and Aoki (2001) have recently reviewed evidence from seventeen programs. In most of these programs, more than 70 percent of initial enrollees stayed with the course until a final test or exam. The median rate of such completion was 78 percent. Other programs from the 1990s were reviewed by Diagne (1999: A11-A12): Three programs reported completion rates of 90 percent or better, two reported between 70–75 percent; and the remaining two reported between 30–50 percent.

Thus, it would seem that a drop-out rate of less than 30 percent is more common than is a higher drop-out rate. A program which has not been covered in the reviews by Oxenham and Aoki, or Diagne, is the World Bank-supported Senegalese PAPF-literacy program (Box 2). This has an estimated national dropout of only 10 percent during a course of approximately eighteen months duration (Diagne, Gueye and Opper 2000). The program has also achieved a respectable scale of operation: about 140,000 learners had been reached cumulatively after five years. Clearly, there is no iron law by which adult literacy programs need have a "high" drop-out rate.

The proportion of initially enrolled learners who at completion will have *met the minimum achievement requirements* of a program will be lower than the "completion" rates. Some completers fail to pass the exams administered. Some may stay in a course until "completion" but not take the exam for fear of the humiliation of a possible failure. Available data show great variation in pass rates. Among fourteen programs reviewed, Oxenham and Aoki found a range of 5 percent to 89 percent. But the median rate among these programs was in fact a respectable 60 percent of *initially enrolled learners*. These rates are much better than the earlier pessimistic impressions, based upon the programs of the 1970s (UNDP 1976:174), of only 8-25 percent of initial enrollees successfully completing literacy programs.

Is retention of literacy skills too poor?

Another line of criticism against ABE has been the claim that literacy skills are easily lost. In making the case for post-literacy materials, Ouane (1999) emphasizes the risk that many newly literate adult learners will relapse into illiteracy unless attention is given to providing learners with a literate environment after the initial acquisition of basic literacy.

It is through their use that literacy skills lead to benefits. And without the prospect of use, there is not much reason to learn the skills to begin with. Successful ABE activities may informally evolve into an extended activity (more of a life-long adult education) if they provide attractions beyond "basic literacy" (e.g., practical projects, as in Uganda).

But in absence of *any special effort* to provide post-literacy materials (e.g., texts for further reading, local news bulletins, "grassroots libraries" or other special interventions to give opportunities to read and write), do the skills in fact atrophy?

To the extent that weak retention is a serious problem in basic education, it can also characterize learning of basic literacy skills in primary schools, as suggested in research by Greaney *et al.* (1999:19) in Bangladesh. For both primary school and ABE alike, one would expect that sustainability of skills acquired will depend on the quality of initial teaching, on opportunity to make use of the skills, and on the motivation of learners to make use of such opportunities as are offered.

There is disagreement as to how serious the problem of poor retention is likely to be in ABE. Wagner and Stites (1999) say that the research base is limited but that retention will depend on the quality of the initial instructional program. They cautiously conclude that it is too soon to draw general conclusions about other issues. Comings (1995) in a review of eight studies is optimistic about robust retention of *reading* skills among adult neo-literates. But he suspects that the retention of writing and arithmetic skills depends more on continued use. He further argues that earlier claims concerning poor retention of reading skills rest on meager documentation, and that such cases which would seem to fit the pessimistic conclusion are likely to be poorly conducted programs in which little learning had occurred to begin with, and for which the

claims of initial achievement probably were exaggerated. (As shown in Chapter 10, the literacy learning achieved in ABE programs is quite modest to begin with.)

ABE is taught in varied settings. In settings with a high overall rate of literacy, and in which there is wide distribution of reading materials in the language in which literacy was acquired, skills will not atrophy but improve without any special effort to promote a literate environment.[2] One example would be Indonesia—a country with a relatively high officially reported literacy rate: 84 percent according to UNESCO's 1998 Statistical Yearbook. Literacy in Indonesia, unlike in many other countries, is also acquired in an official language (Bahasa Indonesia), which is commonly used in print and which is at least for some sections of the population locally derived. Therefore, the environment should be relatively "literate" for adults who have acquired literacy skills in Bahasa Indonesia in the Nonformal Education Program. Findings from the evaluation of that program (Pukat Pengembangan Agribisnis 199?: 2-27) fit the idea that skills improve over time rather than atrophy in that more recent ABE graduates scored lower on literacy skills tests than did those who graduated some years earlier.[3]

Similar results were obtained in Kenya (Carron *et al.*, 1989:219). When graduates from the literacy program were tested as part of their investigation, those who had graduated in earlier years performed better than those who had graduated very recently, suggesting that skills are on the whole being retained and improved upon rather than any relapse into illiteracy. The gains applied particularly to arithmetic (in keeping with the need to use such skills in money transactions) but also to reading and writing.

The 1999 evaluation of literacy in Uganda showed that a two-year lapse leads to virtually no erosion of skills in reading and calculation (Okech *et al.* 2001) in those cases where "literacy graduates" did not continue in the literacy circle (which most of them did) after they graduated from the adult literacy program.[4]

Though reading and arithmetic skills seem to be robust, the need for special interventions in order to provide and disseminate reading materials for adult neo-literates will be especially important where there is very little written material locally available in the language used in ABE. This is common in countries where adult illiteracy is especially high to begin with. But the case for such interventions is broader than that of ensuring that neo-literates not "relapse into illiteracy." Most literate persons who can make use of such interventions will have acquired reading skills in school.

The concepts for designing special interventions to make information more widely accessible to literate persons (sometimes also to illiterates) range from humble grassroots libraries to multipurpose community resource centers that will make use of modern information and communications technology (ICT). Currently, this field is under-developed and under-researched. Pilot projects and evaluations are needed.

Are costs too high in relation to outcomes?

In assessing the costliness of basic education for adults, a side glance at basic education for children is appropriate. But findings from such a comparison must be interpreted with much caution. Primary school has wider learning objectives than literacy. ABE too has wider objectives than literacy alone, and these will relate more to adult life and responsibilities than will primary education. Because adults have more power than children, they will also have the capacity to apply more immediately other useful skills acquired than literacy alone.

However, primary education and ABE do share the key objectives of providing a minimally adequate foundation of skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. This they admittedly provide for different target groups. But adults were once in the target group for primary education, and they remain a group that, according to internationally agreed Education For All policies, should have access to basic education. Can the core of basic education be provided to those adults who actively seek it in a way which is no more costly than primary schooling?

Such estimates as have been attempted indicate that ABE can be a relatively cheap means of producing a level of literacy that allows a person to have some minimal access to the printed word. In assessing the relative costliness of ABE, primary school unit costs serve as a useful comparator—not only because literacy is also acquired in primary school, but also simply because primary school unit costs are the lowest ones within the mainstream school system.

On the cautious assumption that those who passed final examinations in ABE programs achieved a level of literacy no more advanced than what children acquire in two years of primary schooling, Wagner (1995:344) provided unit cost estimates for Guatemala, Ecuador, Tanzania and USA that consistently showed that ABE would be the cheaper of the two paths to what he called "minimum literacy."[5]

Okech *et al.* (1999:105-10,174) found in their study of the government-run functional adult literacy education in Uganda that graduates of the adult literacy courses—even those having had no exposure to school as children—performed better on literacy tests than did children in the fourth grade of primary school. Their cost analysis (conducted by Roy Carr-Hill) showed that the cost of producing three or four years of primary education for a child would very greatly exceed the cost of producing an adult literacy course graduate. He also noted that in both cases only a very low level of literacy was usually achieved.

Oxenham and Aoki (2001) have recently compared cost data available for eight ABE programs and conclude that "the unit costs of a program of adult basic education can be expected to range from a high of about half those of a country's primary school annual unit costs, to a low of about one-seventh." They further argue that if this estimate is read alongside the "finding in Nepal" that a graduate of a nine-month adult basic education program can master the skills of a fifth or sixth grade primary school pupil (Comings *et al.*, 1998:17), "the inference is that the development effects of fiv or six years of schooling can be attained through less than one year of adult basic education at between one-twelfth and one-fortieth the cost." It can readily be seen that ABE would still appear to be a cheap path, even if one made much more modest claims of equivalence with school years.

It must be strongly underlined that, even if ABE serves as a cheap path to "minimum literacy" for the type of learner who takes that path, this does *not* mean it should be seen as a policy *alternative* to primary school. As noted, there is likely to be a type of self-selection to ABE which facilitates a level of motivation and effort that one could not assume if ABE were conceived as an alternative to school for the generality of the population, rather than serving as a second chance for a self-selected group among those who missed school to begin with. Just because those adults who actively seek educational opportunity pick up basic literacy skills faster than children do in school, it does not follow that other adults— not among the small minority who have chosen ABE—would do equally well. Rather than being alternatives, ABE and formal schooling are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

It is also worth reiterating that the case for ABE does not rest on its being a cheap way to basic literacy skills for those who seek it. Illiterate and semi-literate adults are a target group in their own right for basic education, and ABE has other aims and beneficial effects than "minimum literacy" alone.

Are adults too old to learn?

There are theories of learning that imply that adult illiterates' capacity for learning to read with good fluency will be severely constricted by age; therefore, ABE cannot be expected to enable illiterate adults to read significant amounts of text or read with comprehension.[6] However, insofar as adults face any liability in learning to read and write, as compared to children, other conditions must combine to outweigh such disadvantage. As just noted, the weight of evidence is that those adults who enroll in ABE can acquire basic reading skills faster than children do in primary school. This is the main reason why ABE can be a cheap way to minimum literacy—for those who enroll. Such findings include those reported by Comings *et al.* (1998) from Nepal, and by Okech *et al.* (1999) from Uganda. In Uganda, a "conservative" test of ABE achievement was used, in that the primary schools whose pupils were used as comparators with the ABE learners were among the reputedly best schools in the same locality as the ABE courses. Also, the Ugandan study controlled for prior exposure to schooling among the ABE participants.

In the Uganda case, literacy learners who were younger (aged 16-29) on average scored somewhat better than older adults, but the better performance of ABE graduates as compared to primary school children in grades three and four, applied also to older ABE graduates—those in the age groups 30-49, even those in the 50+ group (Tables 6.9, 6.10, 6.17 in Okech *et al.* 2000). It is possible to interpret these striking find-

ings to mean that even the reputedly best primary schools in rural areas were of poor quality. Still, they contradict the argument that being too old should be an important barrier to literacy acquisition in ABE programs.

It is likely that one of the reasons for these "good results" is the high motivation among ABE enrollees. This would agree with a strategy of demand-driven ABE rather than mass campaigns that seek to round up the reluctant adult learners in order to eradicate illiteracy.

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1. Personal communication from Jeanne Moulton.

2. Saldanha argues on the basis of Indian experience that it is harder to develop ABE in towns than in rural areas. In towns there will be more competing claims on time than in villages because of greater institutional complexity. On the other hand, the skills which are initially learned will be more sustainable in an urban environment. (personal communication from Denzil Saldanha, see also Saldanha 1999b). The experience in Senegal also suggests greater attendance problems in the capital city than in villages. But findings do not form any internationally consistent pattern. Carron *et al.* (1989:215, 219) report better attendance in more urban locations than in the rural areas in their Kenyan sample.

3. Another possible explanation would be stronger self-selection according to positive personal characteristics (motivation, some earlier exposure to schooling) among the earlier cohorts.

4. According to Prof. Lalage Bown, Glasgow University: more robust retention of skills in arithmetic and reading, but more vulnerable writing skills are findings paralleled in a survey of retention of skills acquired in primary school in Ghana.

5. So as not to understate costs of ABE, Wagner takes account not only of the resources used on those who complete, but also on those who drop out, and those who fail in the final exam. In his country cases, the same language of instruction would be used in ABE as in primary school.

6. Abadzi (1994).

10

What is Learned in ABE?

Comparing test scores of adults with those of primary school pupils can only provide information about *relative* achievement in overlapping skill elements. It does not indicate the level of skill mastered at the time of "completion." This will vary from program to program. Some programs (as in Indonesia and Namibia) will have completion at several levels; others will have only one level of "basic literacy." However, research on actual learning outcomes in ABE is sparser than research on efficiency and impact.

Diagne and Oxenham (forthcoming) found that only thirteen of the twenty-seven evaluations examined in the BELOISYA project reported on mastery of skills, and that these use different methods to assess what proficiency learners have achieved—interviews, tests, questionnaires, self-evaluations, discussions, and observations. There seemed to be a wide variation both among and within these thirteen programs. The varying forms of the reports prevented any comparison of standards and attainments or any reliable inferences.

Research into learning outcomes is also sparse in primary schooling, but there are studies from some developing countries which document that most primary school pupils fall far short of the type of skills which, according to the curriculum guides, they should have acquired by a certain grade of schooling. Regarding Bangladesh, research by Greaney *et al.* (1999:17) has shown that attaining basic literacy at a level which, according to the primary school curriculum, "ought to be attained" after two to three years ("Minimal Level Competence"), in practice takes more time for the majority. With regard to reading, it takes more than three years of schooling. In writing, it takes more than six years (the primary school has only five age-grades), and with respect to written arithmetic calculations it takes more than five grades for the majority of children who ever reach that level.[1]

In Uganda, equivalence to average achievement in grade four of primary school, which adult literacy course completers in most cases had reached after twelve to eighteen months, represented a weak mastery of reading, writing, and arithmetic (though all was done in the learner's own language). Of reading, writing and arithmetic, reading came most easily. But the literacy achievement in ABE remained rudimentary. Okech *et al.* (1999:v) write:

> The tests revealed that nearly everyone could read and understand the nine very simple questions about their name, today's date, who is the President, etc. However, the average score for the nine rather simple numeracy items was only just over 70 percent, and the average score with six more complicated comprehension questions where the learner is asked to read and understand a question contained in a sentence or a short passage, was only just over 60 percent. Their scores for four simple writing tasks were worse still, with a mean score of just under 40 percent.

It is cold comfort that primary school children performed even worse, after four years of schooling.

Studies of programs in other countries also show modest mastery of reading. In the case of literacy course completers in Tanzania, 60 percent out of a sample of 269 taking a reading proficiency test could

"read a short story of more than one paragraph written in simple language," and at the same time 11 percent could only "read syllables and simple words of maximum two syllables" (Carr-Hill *et al.*,1991:45, 289). As to arithmetic, the Tanzanian study showed that 75 percent (out of 270) literacy course completers were able to do the four arithmetic operations with three-figure numbers but of these relatively proficient learners, only one-quarter could read, understand, and solve a "real life" problem involving such operations (p. 289).

In Kenya, 29 percent of a similar sample (N=291) of literacy course completers demonstrated that they were able to "read and understand a short text relating to their daily life," and another 51 percent could at least "read and understand simple sentences" (Carron *et al.* 1989:189). But 20 percent performed below that level. As to arithmetic, the 73 percent of the 291 course completers tested were at least "generally able to do simple and more complex additions and subtractions as well as simple multiplications and divisions" (pp. 184, 189).

Thus, the level of skill in literacy and numeracy reached in ABE programs is usually modest. What matters more than the level reached during the course is whether that level is high enough to serve as a platform for improvement when the skills are applied in everyday life. As noted earlier, there is reason to be cautiously optimistic about such improvement in the case of reading skills and practical arithmetic. Writing skills seem to be less robustly established among adult neo-literates.[2] However, some of the noted positive impact of ABE—enhanced sense of self-efficacy, support for children's schooling—can be substantial even when the literacy gains are relatively modest. To a large extent, ABE as a social activity seems to build attitudes and social capital.

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1. However, oral mastery of the same arithmetic operations at "minimum competence level" is achieved earlier by the majority on the basis of grade four. It should be noted that the persons tested in this sample (N= 5200) ranged in age from eleven to more than fifty. Thus, both learning gains and learning losses, *since completion of school*, were reflected in these test scores. The findings suggested that, with regard to oral arithmetic, mastery improved with experience after school (p 19) for persons with very little schooling (up to grade three), but that there were significant losses "after school" with regard to reading and writing skills.

2. The pattern of writing lagging behind reading is also how literacy historically evolved in economically advanced countries.

11

Areas of Policy Choice

In considering investments in ABE, some of the policy issues which governments, NGOs, and funding agencies need to address are:

- Targeting of groups
- Roles for government agencies, for civil society (including the issue of outsourcing provisions to NGOs), and for business companies
- What strategies should be supported (campaigns, centrally run systems, community based or outsourced initiatives)?
- How should teachers be recruited, trained, supported, managed, and compensated for their work?
- What languages should be used?
- What level of ambition regarding use of information and communications technology is realistic for ABE purposes?
- What curriculum/skills should be taught?
- Should equivalence with formal schooling be sought?
- What teaching materials should be used?
- What teaching methods should be used?
- What special measures may be expedient to ensure adequate internal efficiency?
- How should ABE be financed?
- Monitoring and evaluation.

Some of these issues will be more broadly *political*, others will be more exclusively *technical*; but they are *policy issues* in the sense of pertaining to decisions about the general direction of ABE in any context.

Targeting groups

The targeting of certain groups should define the sites, recruitment efforts, and curriculum of ABE. Yet, there is often a good case for relatively open doors to reach others beyond those first selected *if* this does not occur at the expense of someone from the targeted group. If one hopes to turn ABE into a community learning event, it makes little sense to exclude eager comers just because they "have had too much school already" or seem to be too old for a course geared towards out-of-school youth.

Age is a first criterion in targeting. Assuming that the core of ABE will be literacy and numeracy skills intended for those missed by primary schools, ABE is not for those who should be in primary school. If stopgap exceptions are made, it is important to ensure that some access to ABE for children of school age will not curtail efforts to establish a primary school; and children will in any event require a different pedagogy from what is appropriate for adults.

Other targeting criteria could be:

- women, mothers of school-aged children
- regions/localities in which the rate of illiteracy is high
- locations (and individuals) demanding ABE most strongly
- established groups that wish to sponsor ABE (churches, associations, businesses and industries, the military)
- community leaders
- occupational groups especially likely to benefit from ABE (e.g., small-scale entrepreneurs)

- younger adults
- especially vulnerable groups (adolescent street children, marginalized minority groups).

The choice of curriculum, learning materials and general pedagogic approach should take account of the experience and wishes of the target group. For instance, equivalence with the mainstream education system is likely to be more important for young than for old learners. Regional and rural-urban variation will also matter, especially for the choice of practical projects related to livelihood. Cost, and the size of a target group, will constrain the extent to which ABE can be custom-made. Variation in learning materials in order to achieve adaptation to local conditions is found in the Functional Adult Literacy program in Uganda. An approach that is even more strongly driven by each group and circumstances is ActionAid's REFLECT program, which relies entirely on materials development at each local site (Box 3).

Widely conceived, a target group for ABE is simply illiterate and semi-literate adults (and youth above school age) who demand education. To launch ABE with the aim of also including the reluctant learners in an all-out attempt to eradicate literacy is a recipe for weak implementation. But response to demand cannot be the only and absolute criterion. There will also be a case for including the especially needy, who are unlikely to have organized themselves to ask for ABE—for example, adolescent street children.

ABE can be a component in projects or an ongoing organized activity with other goals. Choosing an already established group can help sustain motivation for ABE; participants will then have other reasons to meet—e.g., local groups of farmers established to develop and help market new crops, religious congregations. An issue will then be how far the materials and curricula will need to be adapted to the purposes for which the group exists.

Learning will be facilitated when learners recognize that literacy is directly useful for functions that they need to perform—e.g., a special literacy course for people serving on locally elected councils (Senegal), or ABE for groups of women micro-entrepreneurs.

The importance of targeting illiterate women is indicated both on social justice grounds and on efficiency grounds. In most African countries, most illiterate adults are women. At the same time, they are more motivated than illiterate men to join ABE courses, even in those countries where men more often are illiterate.[1] As noted, by reaching mothers (and mothers to be), ABE backs children's education.

Roles for government and NGOs

Usually both government and nongovernment organizations have responsibility for ABE. Both government and NGOs take many forms. In most developing countries "government" refers to the central state and to the local presence of its administrative apparatus. However, decentralization is now underway in many countries, establishing elective government at regional or local levels. African examples include Uganda, Ethiopia, Senegal, South Africa, Mozambique.

NGOs differ as to their highest level of organization (international, national, regional, local). They also differ as to their community base at the local level. A variety of combinations exist. Community based organizations (CBOs) would be local NGOs with a strong community base. At the other extreme are international NGOs which lack any organizational presence at all in the locality in which they operate—apart from their project. There are also NGOs which have both a strong local community base and an international strong central organization. A prime example would be the Catholic Church, which arguably is the World's largest NGO. Further, "local" need not mean a strong *community* base. Some local NGOs are of the proprietary kind, brought into existence to provide their "owners" with a living while also providing a service, and functioning much like a small business operation in their dealings with government and funding agencies.

Government will have reasons for exercising some regulation of ABE. Regulation is implicit when government itself is the owner/provider of ABE. When it is not, the reason for regulation is stronger when government is the paymaster. If ABE is to operate as part of a larger system, there are certain strategic functions that must be performed. These include long-term planning, training of staff, financing, and quality assurance. Large NGOs can perform such functions for their own provisions. But if ABE is to be subject to some overall political direction, and if the goal is to develop it to greater scale than NGO provisions can achieve, these are among the first functions for government to perform. Government needs to allocate needed financing and competent staff to these key functions. Gov-

ernment will have a role to play in taking measures to encourage motivation for literacy (e.g., as conditions for certain licenses), support to continuing literacy (a public library system), and direct literacy courses for its own employees. In any renewal and restructuring of systems that for some time have remained sorely under-resourced and inert, strong political leadership is needed. As Bennett (1995:9) notes, it will generally be necessary to develop a high level of resources to institutional development if ABE gets prioritized by government and external sources of funding because the level of activity in most countries has been distinctly low in the last few decades

Different ministries often have responsibility for different aspects of ABE. If a government wants to formulate a policy for renewed investment in ABE, it has an occasion for reexamining the roles that different agencies and ministries should have. A recurring question tends to be: which is the stronger—the case for integrating the government ABE activities into a unitary service or the case which each agency makes for integrating ABE activity into its particular sector (e.g., agriculture, defense, local government development)?

Solutions other than administering ABE through established formal government departments are possible. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, responsibility for adult literacy education is vested in an independently financed national literacy foundation which can accept donor, government and charity financing, and even do contract work. Responsibility for this foundation is vested in a board of directors representative of groups that are major organizational stakeholders in adult literacy activity. In Senegal, responsibility for administering contracts with NGOs and small entrepreneurs that operate ABE provisions in return for government funding, is handled by an independent agency set up to function along principles of business management.

If minimizing dropout from ABE programs were the sole concern, there is no clear-cut pattern favoring either government or NGOs as the provider, according to the limited data available for international comparison. Oxenham and Aoki (2001), in a survey of seventeen programs, failed to detect any general superiority of NGO provisions over those of the state, in terms of completion rates and of pass rates among those who at completion sat for exams/tests. Among these programs, the Nijera Shikhi literacy movement in Bangladesh (Cawthera 1997), and three cases which used Action Aid's REFLECT approach (Archer and Cottingham 1996), stood out as "successes"; all were NGO programs. But so did the state operated literacy program in Indonesia with reported completion rates ranging from 78 to 90 percent. Also, the older government programs in Iran and Thailand had claimed completion above 80 percent in the 1970s.

In the present National Literacy Program in Namibia, which is run by the state, a respectable 53 percent of those who initially enroll are reported to pass the literacy test at the end of the first stage (basic literacy in one's own language). Thus, there is no iron law to the effect that a state cannot mount and sustain a ABE program on a large scale with respectable efficiency. But one would expect that the more successful government programs would be those that have a strong community base and are responsive to local demand, rather than the "all-out" campaigns of the 1970s. One example is the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) program run by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in Uganda (Box 1).

Regardless of whether the government itself is a provider of ABE, there is a strong case for pursuing a policy of close collaboration with NGOs/CBOs. The reasons include:

- Partnership can mobilize more finance and human resources for ABE.
- NGOs have much experience from which a partnership will benefit.
- By adding variety to provisions, NGOs can give needed flexibility to ABE in order to take better account of local circumstances.
- Involving CBOs is a means of building needed local social support for ABE.
- The development of national associations of NGOs and CBOs can provide critical feedback to government from independently organized interest groups.

Collaboration depends on shared goals and mutual trust. These preconditions tend to improve as government becomes more broadly based and more appreciative of a pluralist civil society.

The case for government collaboration with NGOs will be especially strong when NGOs have a lead in expertise and scale of operation, at the time when a government wants to step up investments in ABE. Partnership can achieve more than separate efforts. Thus, the government of Namibia is looking for partnerships with NGOs in order to improve upon its ABE

Box 1
Functional adult literacy in Uganda

The FAL (Functional Adult Literacy) program is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. A comprehensive evaluation of FAL and of some NGO programs has recently been completed (Okech *et al.* 1999, 2000).

Three operational years into the program, FAL had by early 1999 succeeded in enrolling some 140,000 adult learners in 26 districts out of 45. For comparison, the combined enrollment in various NGO-operated literacy courses is estimated at 20-30,000. Data on attrition during the FAL course are not available, but what is striking is that the great majority of those who "graduate" by passing the literacy exam (which is deemed to require 200-250 hours of teaching over roughly one year), continue to take part in the course—showing enduring attraction of the group activity to most "completers."

FAL graduates were compared with samples of pupils who had completed three to four years of education in primary schools of reputation in the same districts as the FAL groups. The FAL graduates scored better on tests of literacy and numeracy. Graduates of FAL and of ActionAid's REFLECT program were compared as to test scores. After controlling for prior exposure to schooling, there were very little difference between these two groups. FAL graduates performed slightly better among learners who had never been to school. REFLECT seemed to perform slightly better among learners who had had some prior schooling. But the variable that mattered most for test performance was which district a group was in—not which agency was running the program.

Some five-eights of the FAL participants report they had taken part in various practical "functional" projects associated with the literacy work (usually related to livelihood activities), and most say they have earned some cash from such activities.

Local initiative is needed to get a FAL group started because the program has so far relied on unpaid volunteer instructors recruited from the community. The unit recurrent costs (not including central administrative overheads) are distinctly low—estimated to be in the range of $4-5 equivalent per annum but expected to rise to $13-14 per annum if FAL starts paying the instructors a stipend.

FAL teaches literacy in the vernacular and makes use of primers whose contents have also been adapted to some extent for different regional target groups. From REFLECT it has adopted some use of Rural Appraisal Techniques as a supplementary pedagogic device.

The Ministry has involved NGOs in the training of trainers and instructors for FAL. Much operational responsibility for FAL is now being devolved upon elected district councils.

provisions which are "large scale," growing, and which have a respectable completion rate (Policy Guidelines for the Second Phase of the National Literacy Programme 1996-2000, p. 36).

Some NGOs will have special technical expertise which is useful for the national system. In Uganda, LABE (a national NGO) has been assisting the government in the training of trainers and instructors. Another example is SIL (Summer Institute of Linguists), which has assisted government programs in many countries in developing orthographies in local languages. During 2000 the Government of Mozambique has been consulting widely with NGOs about a new policy for ABE.

Usually NGOs will have capacity only to cater to a small portion of the effective demand for ABE from their own funding channels. A major role for government is therefore needed. But in choosing sites and target groups, government can usefully seek complementarity to NGO provisions. The easiest ABE provisions for government to organize will usually be those which can most be run like regular schools, and which can share some staffing and facilities with schools. Classes for adolescents who are too old for starting regular primary school fit this bill.

Roles for business and industry

Some larger companies have become involved in ABE for their own employees or suppliers. The skills can be of great importance in work situations—e.g., literate miners can more easily understand safety instructions.

In South Africa, there is a strong political commitment to provide basic education for adults and youth by means of a recently developed program Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). A major part of the government's ABET strategy is to encourage employers to run or support ABET. As an employer, government itself also has a responsibility to provide ABET opportunities for its own employees. A number of private companies are involved. Some of these stand out as ABET leaders. One example is First National Bank, which has been pioneering approaches in basic business English, and literacy teaching, using computer assisted learning.

ABET in South African companies gets a special impetus from the need to redress the inequities of Apartheid. But there are also some examples of workplace-based programs in other African countries. In the northern region of Côte d'Ivoire, CFDT, a cotton company, has supported adult literacy programs for farmers involved in cotton production.

Box 2
Literacy by "*Faire-faire*" in SENEGAL: Outsourcing to NGOs and CBOs

The PAPF Program (Literacy program prioritizing the participation of women), which is run by the Ministry of Basic Education and National Languages in five regions of Senegal and peri-urban areas of Dakar, has with its functional and post-literacy courses since 1995 cumulatively reached more than 150,000 learners. The most recent (fifth) intake for the functional literacy courses was 54,000. The post-literacy program has over three intakes enrolled 15,500 learners. There is a large unmet demand. At last intake there were applications for an estimated total of 183,000 participants. More than 80 percent of the learners are in the 15-39 age range. About three-quarters are women (rising to nine-tenths in the 5th intake).

The functional literacy classes are to provide a minimum of 300 hours instruction over an eighteen-month period, with a minimum of twenty people per class. Literacy is taught in local languages. Each provider can choose from a list of curricula approved for functional literacy by the National Directorate. PAPF includes a post-literacy program, in which over three intakes have enrolled 15,500 learners. It also includes local newspapers in each region in the local language, and projects related to agriculture, health, the environment. There are plans to link PAPF with access to micro-credit and to local learning resource centers, which also will serve a wider target group than PAPF participants. Of the total volume of publications (101 books/booklets, including a dictionary in Wolof) 187,000 copies have been sold.

A major achievement is a low drop-out rate that has been estimated at 10 percent (dropout is higher in the capital than in rural areas).

In PAPF the actual teaching is being outsourced to more than 420 local non-government providers, up from 77 providers in 1995—showing that it is possible to create a rapidly growing market of training provisions over a short period. The prospective literacy operators submit applications according to a manual of procedures and are screened and nominated by a national selection board appointed by the Minister. The financial management of the contractual relations with operators (and some routine monitoring) has been outsourced to AGETIP, a parastatal agency experienced in project administration. The Ministry, through its executing agency (the project management unit), concentrates on planning and program design, program implementation (including training of the operators), capacity development, and quality assurance. The National Directorate of Literacy and Basic Education is primarily responsible for evaluation and monitoring of the national literacy program, of which the PAPF is part. Each contracting NGO hires its own teachers, most of whom are locally recruited and have a lower secondary school background. There must be one supervisor per ten classes.

For internal monitoring purposes, achievement tests are conducted in reading, writing, and arithmetic (these are not used to certify whether participants have met certain requirements for "passing"). The unit recurrent cost of the eighteen-month program (not counting administrative overheads of government) is estimated to be roughly equivalent of US$37-43. Beneficiaries are to contribute towards the cost of their course (the minimum is set to an amount equivalent to about US$4.50) The operators are required to provide written materials "at a reasonable price."

ABE will again receive social support from being lodged in an organization that participants belong to and participate in on a daily basis. It was partly in order to draw on such social props that the literacy campaigns of FRELIMO in socialist Mozambique in the late 1970s used modern sector companies as main bases for literacy work (Lind 1988). Under less *dirigiste* regimes, the involvement of business and industry in ABE will be established in a voluntary manner, but the social support that the workplace provides can matter greatly for successful completion of ABE. Prospects for improved pay and promotion can also motivate workers to take part.

Outsourcing to NGOs

In some countries, outsourcing is the government's dominant policy for implementing ABE. Senegal is a prime example. Other countries already committed to this policy are Côte d'Ivoire and Gambia. Several other countries in West Africa are actively considering policy shifts towards complete or partial outsourcing of ABE provisions. Under outsourcing, NGOs are remunerated by government for providing ABE. In some countries, government has opted for a combination of outsourcing and running its own program (e.g., in Bangladesh).

The current experience from Senegal (Box 2) shows that it is possible to create rapid growth of ABE and a market of ABE provisions by means of outsourcing (Gueye and Diagne 1999; Diagne, Gueye and Opper 2000). The better the financial incentive offered by government, the greater will be the supply of provisions. In Senegal, during the five years of implementing their "*faire-faire*" policy, a great number of new suppliers have emerged: an increase from 77 to 420 providers, many of small scale.

The unit recurrent cost (exclusive of overheads carried by government) of the Senegalese program is estimated to be in the range of US$37-43 for the eighteen month basic functional literacy course. On a per annum basis, the unit recurrent cost of the functional adult literacy course is roughly half the cost per child of a year's primary schooling in Senegal.[2] Still, the cost seems high compared to ABE costs in other African countries where information is available.

A certain amount of distrust from within the government civil service towards the NGO operators as "outsiders," can be expected when outsourcing is introduced. Strong political commitment may be required to overcome the skepticism of some civil servants about losing direct control of provisions.

Under outsourcing, quality assurance procedures and cost monitoring become an operational necessity. Like any form of contracting, outsourcing makes it important for the government to define clearly the objectives and the criteria for determining whether contracts have been fulfilled. It is also necessary to follow up on reports received from providers by spot-checking on conditions in the field. Depending on the strength of the incentives, new operators will seek to enter the market simply in order to generate income and employment for their staff, without necessarily acting much like a charitable NGO or a community based organization—it can become like any other business activity.[3] This adds to the supply of willing providers, but also adds importance to monitoring since the ultimate beneficiaries are not themselves the buyer of the service they receive.

The official language and the vernacular

Internationally, there is growing professional and political support for using the mother tongue to teach literacy. Failing that, one should use a language that has widespread local currency. Obviously, if one is learning to read and write, it is an advantage to know the language one is taught in. But in practice this is not easily achieved because there are many countries (including nearly all African countries) in which there is a wide gap between the official language and the home language of most people, and in which the several vernaculars have a very weak position in print and in the mainstream school system—even when schools are supposed to do initial teaching of literacy in the vernacular.

To teach basic literacy in a language completely unfamiliar to the learner is a recipe for pedagogic disaster. To ignore the learner's own language is also to dismiss the educational importance of the learner's own culture. On the other hand, acquiring literacy in a language in which very little reading material is available, will lead nowhere. Ideal solutions are not possible for such dilemmas. Development of much post-literacy materials in the learner's own language is often not practicable as part of an ABE project. Sometimes another language of wider currency, with which the learners already have some familiarity, will be the optimal solution for teaching initial literacy. But this is not always possible. For example, government initiatives in Burkina Faso to teach Moore to other population groups who speak and understand Moore met with resistance, for social and cultural reasons in the case of some groups.

In any event, it is important to provide access to continuation courses in the official language that dominates in the formal education system. For example, the National Literacy Program in Namibia starts out with home languages in the lower stages, then switches to English for those who continue to the highest stage. A bilingual strategy of this kind will often be the best choice. It is important to make use of opportunities to collaborate across country boundaries in order to reduce costs and make available a wider range of texts when materials are produced in a local language which is spoken by people in different countries (Vawda and Patrinos 1999).

Campaigns versus institutions

Campaigns, with their large-scale activities and objectives—to be achieved in a short period—are politically "hot" and have a sense of urgency about them (Bhola 1999:288). The extent of the literacy gains achieved by campaigns remains controversial. In many cases campaigns have been so politicized that the claims which their protagonists have made for them have lacked external credibility. However, political affinity apart, few would dispute that the campaigns in countries like the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and in more recent decades in Tanzania, Cuba, and Nicaragua made substantial advances in reducing illiteracy. In addition, the most carefully documented case of a literacy course that had clearly positive impact upon child health is the Sandinista-initiated literacy campaign in Nicaragua (Sandiford *et al.* 1995).

The key to the achievement of some campaigns is that they occur in the context of far ranging political change where large numbers of people perceive their conditions of life to be changing, and where they therefore perceive both fresh opportunities and the need for personal change and new skills. However, campaigns run out of steam as enthusiasm abates, and as persons learn to evade the heavy political pressure which has been inducing reluctant "volunteering." Lind (1988) has described how in the case of the 1978–1982 literacy campaigns in Mozambique, management became more bureaucratic, the mobilizing activities decreased, and participation declined.

The criticism of campaigns has been that whatever success they do achieve is temporary and lacks sustainability, and that the skills acquired are fast unlearned. But research on the retention of literacy achieved by campaigns in comparison with literacy taught by more established institutions is lacking.

Campaigns can exploit windows of opportunity which present themselves in some countries at times when solidarity and dedication are unusually strong among those whose very active contributions are called upon. But they will not be effective solutions for more ordinary and settled social conditions.

At present, the "campaign approach" has been abandoned in nearly all countries which have used it in the past.[4] But few, if any, developing countries have opted for the other extreme: fixed institutions with their own local buildings and with teachers who are part of the state civil service.

Volunteers versus functionaries

"Volunteering" to teach literacy, sometimes induced by high-pressure political mobilization, was part of the campaign approach. At present more true voluntarism plays an important part in the work done by some NGOs. One example is the Nijera Shikhi people's literacy movement in Bangladesh. The work is carried out by a growing number (currently more than 40,000) of voluntary organizers, helpers (teachers), and children's education promoters who establish local committees to plan and run literacy classes for adolescents and adults as well as working to improve the performance of primary schools. The volunteers are largely self-trained, use books and guides supplied to them, and receive minimal guidance from the Nijera Shikhi staff. As of 1997, about 230,000 people had become literate through this volunteer-assisted self education approach (Cawthera 1997).

Social recognition and knowing that one is doing valuable work can be a powerful motivator. Without the strong leveraging by politicized campaigns, large-scale volunteerism within government programs is still possible. One example is Uganda (Box 1). But people expect to be remunerated for their work when they know that others who work at higher levels in the same service are being paid. Like the campaigns with which it usually has been associated, volunteerism tends to exhaust itself (Saldanha 1999b). By paying for the services, one will obtain a greater supply of willing teachers. In Uganda there is now doubt about the sustainability of relying on volunteers.

However, the opposite model to volunteerism, of teachers employed for life as civil servants and accountable only to the state, does not seem appropriate for ABE either. The need for ABE is the greatest in countries which can least afford expansion in their civil service. Further, ABE is a form of education which needs to adapt approach and content to the circumstances of the clientele. A strong community base and instructors recruited from the community are desirable conditions. The civil servant model is not well suited for this.

When financing is found, comparability with national government pay scales can cause problems when instructors are "community recruited." In Namibia, teachers were recruited on fixed-term contracts from the community served by the literacy program. They achieved a raise in 1994, which meant that for ten hours work a week, they would receive more pay than full time workers were earning in many of the communities served. This caused local jealousies and tensions in the program (Lind 1996:97, Bhola 1995:90).

One compromise between pure volunteerism and regular wages is to use valued objects as prizes or incentives. In the Ghana National Functional Literacy Program, literacy facilitators are recruited from the local community. After successfully completing one literacy course and having recruited a batch of learners for the next one, they are given either a bicycle or sewing machine as a prize (Leno 1999). To honor their work, this prize is presented to them at a public gathering. A disadvantage of this approach is the complexity of procuring and distributing prizes (in Ghana delays have caused frustration). Another disadvantage

may be that the receipt of the prize instills a sense that one could now relax because of a mission accomplished. A wage has the advantage of being a steady stream of rewards, and it gives more leverage for improving performance.

The view that it is necessary to pay facilitators/instructors was the position taken at a 1998 workshop in Ghana on REFLECT methodology in ABE, which had participants from seventeen African countries—mostly government officials and some NGOs. Similarly, senior officials from eleven African countries who met as part of the BELOISYA workshop in Chad in March 1999 generally agreed that it was necessary to pay instructors— though they recognize that this will drive up the unit cost in countries that have been relying on volunteers. The meeting also recognized that there are losses of flexibility as programs become professionalized and more firmly institutionalized. If ABE is run as a state-provided service staffed by teachers who are regular functionaries, there are risks of bureaucratic inflexibility (Maamouri 1999:10).

Paying them on fixed-term contracts (as in Namibia) has the advantage of being able to staff activities more flexibly in response to changing local demand for ABE, and of not having to add to the size of the regular civil service. Viewing ABE as part of community development means that accountability of the teachers to the community is also desirable. There is also a reason to bear in mind the income levels in the communities served by ABE when instructors' pay is determined.

Selection, training, and supervision of teachers are the tools for ensuring the quality of education. Usually ABE programs are run with minimal initial training (a few weeks) and sporadic supervision. This makes selection especially important. As Comings (forthcoming) emphasizes, the best criterion for selection is that a teacher has been successful in the past. This means that it is important to ensure that good teachers are retained in an ABE program, and that poor teachers are let go as soon as possible. Involving the prospective learners in the selection of their teachers could serve also as a stepping stone towards community based supervision, to supplement infrequent supervision from the outside.

What should ABE teach?

In contemporary society any concept of basic education will include skills of reading, writing, and practical arithmetic. Beyond this core there is a case for much relativism about what to teach adults. Different groups of adult learners will differ greatly in what they already have learned among those elements of knowledge and skill which are directly useful to them or otherwise important to them. Unless ABE offers knowledge and skills which address the learners' individual or collective purposes, they will walk away. Compared to children, they have stronger competing claims on their time. There is work to be done, and there are children to care for. ABE also lacks the extrinsic motivation that formal schooling has at least at intermediate and higher levels, since ABE rarely leads to credentials which have recognized labor market currency.

Because ABE has a more tenuous hold on its clientele, it is less amenable to bureaucratic planning and controls. To enlist and sustain interest, ABE needs to engage with the learners on their own terms and to build social incentives for voluntary participation. Within a perspective on ABE that stresses individual and collective empowerment, there is a case for offering civic education components stressing exercise of one's rights and civic responsibilities. But in the final analysis, what is "basic" will be contingent on what the learners actually want, and on the life situation of the learners, within the range of what can realistically be offered.

Since the learners are usually poor, an emphasis on skills for improved livelihood will fit what many learners would like to acquire from ABE. The evaluative reviews of recent literacy documentation prepared for the World Bank's BELOISYA activity stress the attraction to adult learners of skills which are perceived as helpful in this regard (Diagne 1999, Maamouri 1999:7). But there is still much uncertainty about how best to organize the teaching of such skills. Not much analysis has been done of experience to date. A comprehensive recent review by Bennell (1999:2) of skills development for the poor (whether as part of wider ABE activity or not) concludes that "there is an emerging consensus that skills development for the poor must be part and parcel of community-based economic and political development" [which] "maximizes locally available skills and empowers the poor to learn for themselves." This means that it would usually be insufficient to think of such development as something that can be achieved by teaching alone. It leaves much to be locally defined as to exactly how such development can best be achieved.

The Uganda Functional Literacy Program (Okech *et al.* 1999) demonstrates that it is possible to develop livelihood-related "functional activities" on a large scale as part of ABE. As mentioned earlier, two-thirds of the Uganda learners claim they have had some cash income from the functional skills they acquired. The most realistic ambition is to teach skills which are a concrete extension of activities the learners already know—e.g., teaching farmers techniques of introducing a new crop. In any large-scale program, what can be taught and put to use would need to be fairly simple. Developing a micro-credit program *as an extension of ABE* is an example of a provision which, in spite of its popularity to the clientele, will nearly always require more business savvy and organizing skills than the local ABE staff and instructors possess.

Further review of experience and approaches in "livelihood skills" taught as components within ABE is needed before one has a basis for more specific recommendations. At present, it is evident that the teaching of such practical skills is an attraction to learners. But here is scant knowledge about the benefits reaped from their acquisition.

Other uses than those related to livelihood can be important to learners. What people experience as "functional," in the sense of serving purposes important to them, goes beyond the proverbial reading of instructions on fertilizer bags. As noted, in the Ghana literacy program, Korboe (1997) found that using literacy in church is an important application of skills. A narrowly utilitarian interpretation of "curriculum relevance" for ABE would exclude not only religion[5] but also the linking of ABE to such activities as music, story telling, handicrafts, and popular theatre.

There is an evident need for flexibility and to be demand-driven in choice of contents. A minimum step in that direction would be to adapt literacy primers to local conditions. Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques can similarly be a powerful tool for local contextualization of learning. The government functional literacy program in Uganda has both of these features. In practice there will be constraints on the extent to which materials and curricula can be tailor-made to suit particular groups. *Some* degree of standardization is needed both to assure cost-effective use of scarce resources, and as needed guidelines for locally produced materials. Several countries have established a core curriculum which is supplemented by a local curriculum, adapted to local needs, often with the involvement of NGOs or CBOs. Even REFLECT, the approach that most strongly stresses local making of learning materials, has also relied on specified *processes* intended to be common to all REFLECT circles.

Coverage of HIV/AIDS

The need for precautions against HIV and for care for persons suffering from AIDS is at present so obvious in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that ABE should include it. ABE would not be the main channel for educating people about HIV/AIDS—its scale of operation is too small for that to be possible. But the enormity of the pandemic is such that all channels must play their part. Topics on HIV/AIDS should be informed by what participants already know, and build upon that.

Information and communication technology (ICT) in support of ABE

Radio is a major medium of adult basic education in its own right. It has the advantage of wide distribution and of being listened to by literate and illiterate people alike. On its own it cannot teach literacy, but it can back up such teaching. The simplest and most obvious use of radio is to publicize and promote ABE. Radio broadcasts in the local languages in which ABE is taught can also help build the status of these languages for modern usage.

Radio has the special advantage that it is much more widely available among illiterate adults than are other distance education media (audiocassettes, TV, computers). In Uganda, about 40 percent of those taking part in the functional adult literacy courses surveyed by Okech *et al.* (1999) said they had a *working* radio. It is noteworthy that the percentage was the same among the control group of illiterates. A substantially higher proportion is likely to have listening access to a working radio.

If the work of local literacy groups can be coordinated with the timing of radio transmissions that are relevant to particular contents, it can be used as a direct support for ABE teaching—e.g., giving the audience a deeper grasp of 'functional' skills taught by ABE, and generally enlivening and supporting the literacy classes. The Ghana literacy program (Leno 1999) sought to make use of radio in this manner. However, the experience of that program confirms the general

Box 3
The REFLECT approach in fifty countries worldwide

An example of participatory pedagogy is the REFLECT approach which has been developed by the international NGO ActionAid and which has spread rapidly through other organizations across Africa, Asia and Latin America. REFLECT: Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques.

This approach makes use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques to identify local issues/problems of shared concern to the participants in a REFLECT circle. The teaching of literacy is built upon the visual materials generated in each community, whether maps, matrices, calendars or diagrams. A strong link is made between active discussion of local issues and the capacity of people to communicate about them and act upon them. Empowering participants so that they are better enabled to improve their conditions of life is a central objective, and the need for literacy is seen as interwoven with this.

There is an emphasis on actively producing texts rather than passively reading. Core materials to read are produced by participants with the help of a facilitator. Primers are dispensed with on the grounds that they are seen as barriers to a participatory approach. However, supplementary reading materials are brought into the circles for practice and critical reading.

To assist the facilitators, ActionAid developed a Mother Manual which gave numerous examples of how one could practice this method. However, in recent years ActionAid has discouraged reliance on any manual on the grounds that manuals tend too much to be used as a recipe book, thus discouraging truly participatory methods. There is now an international network of practitioners who retain close contact with one another in order to promote learning and develop core resource/reference materials.

Literacy facilitators are recruited locally, given a short initial course in REFLECT methodology, typically of two to three weeks' duration. This is followed up by regular meetings of local facilitators (initially every two weeks, later monthly), ongoing refresher training (three to five days every few months) and by support/supervision visits by supervisors who often are of high educational caliber (approximately once a month, though the focus is now on encouraging facilitators to visit or accompany one another more regularly).

The REFLECT approach has spread far beyond ActionAid's own operations. There are now over 250 organizations working with REFLECT methodology in 50 countries. The largest single REFLECT program is in Bangladesh where 27,000 learners have been reached in 26 districts and 1,074 facilitators have been trained in over 36 organizations. In Africa, REFLECT programs are underway in Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

In addition to being adopted by NGOs, CBOs, and social movements, there are pilot REFLECT programs now being run by many governments, including Bangladesh, Burundi, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Governments representatives from seventeen African countries have received training in the approach. In many other cases, governments have taken elements of REFLECT and integrated them into existing programs, for example with Participatory Rural Appraisal now being featured in Uganda and Namibia.

REFLECT was first developed between 1993 and 1995 and was evaluated by ActionAid itself in Bangladesh, El Salvador, and Uganda (Archer & Cottingham 1996). It showed relatively high rates of retention of learners: 60 percent-70 percent completing the initial learning process and acquiring basic literacy. The evaluations also showed a connection between the program and a range of other positive developmental outcomes, including children's schooling, health and hygiene, community participation, collective action, improved resource management and gender roles.

In 2000, an international evaluation on a larger scale was undertaken. External evaluations of REFLECT were being conducted in Uganda, Malawi, Mozambique, Burundi, Ghana, South Africa, Sudan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, El Salvador.

impression that it is difficult to ensure sufficient coordination to make concerted multimedia teaching possible (K. Siabi-Mensah, forthcoming in R. Siaciwena (Ed.), cited in Dodds 1999).

When designing ABE teaching materials and supportive radio transmissions, it is realistic to assume that the audiences would only *partly* overlap and that one will rarely achieve coverage of the same curriculum elements at the same time by radio as in a literacy class—in those cases when ABE participants do listen in. It is nonetheless possible to use radio transmissions for reinforcement of thematic functional contents that relate to broad sections of the curriculum and which would be valuable both for those who have covered related contents already, and those who have not.

Using cassettes has more potential than radio as a genuine multi-media pedagogy to enrich the functional knowledge teaching in an ABE course, or even in some cases as direct tools in the teaching of basic literacy skills. Support in the form of cassettes requires fairly simple technology at each ABE site. On the other hand, it requires a system of making and distributing recordings. This adds some cost and organizational complexity. But the extra visits which local coordina-

tors/supervisors need to make in order to distribute cassettes can also be used for other in-service support purposes.

In South Africa, experiments have begun in the use of computer software for teaching literacy (with backup from a teacher). Whatever the potential of such technology may be in countries which can afford its high cost and provide the needed logistics, computer assisted literacy teaching is not yet realistic as an affordable and large-scale provision in those African countries where the adult illiteracy rate is the highest and the need for ABE is the greatest. In the future, cheap and robust solar powered computers could possibly remove these constraints. However, modern ICT tools could have a role to play in the training of trainers. This is currently being explored by the International Literacy Institute of the University of Pennsylvania in the Bridges to the Future Initiative.

Equivalence with schooling

Some ABE curricula are officially recognized as equivalent to a certain number of years in primary school.[6] Though few ABE learners will use such equivalence to continue in school, there is the fear that nonformal provisions inevitably will be perceived as less important if they are not integrated into the mainstream system. There is also the hope that declared equivalence to better known credentials will have labor market value. Equity considerations can argue for equivalence, as will a long-term vision of eventually moving from ABE to a "learning society" with life-long opportunities for organized education and training. In South Africa today, the establishment of a national qualifications framework that gives recognition to all forms of education, as well as skills which have been informally acquired, is part of the effort to redress injustice suffered under Apartheid. ABE provisions in South Africa are required to fit into that framework.

The argument for equivalence will be more important for the younger segments of the ABE clientele—those deemed to still be young enough to continue in school after ABE. However, in the context of countries where the need for ABE is the greatest, the risk is that "equivalence" in practice will benefit the very few who would continue in school while unduly constraining curriculum design for the many. In particular, deciding in advance that ABE should be geared to school equivalence will reduce the possibility of using a participatory process among the participants themselves to define what is to be learned.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that younger ABE learners should be taught in the same way as their age mates who are in school, since one element of ABE learners' circumstances is that they are fulfilling adult roles. Material relevant to survival in the adult world will therefore have a much greater importance for younger ABE learners than for their age mates in school.

Participatory pedagogy

Self-respecting, mature adults will submit less easily to a style of teaching which treats them like children—than will children. Unlike school children, who are sent to school and held there by adult authority, adult learners are not so easily rendered into a captive audience. A minimum requirement to appropriate pedagogy for adults is that the learners be treated with the respect to which mature persons are entitled. Beyond this minimum, one would expect that the more strongly ABE aims to build the learners' self-confidence and sense of personal efficacy, the more participatory the pedagogy should be.

Participatory pedagogy demands competent and confident teaching. The question is how far one can move towards such pedagogy in programs that are implemented on a large scale. The initial course for instructors/facilitators of ABE is usually no more than two weeks. The only pedagogy of which such instructors will have had personal experience is what they themselves have experienced as pupils. This is usually the "frontal teaching" of primary and secondary school. A common constraint in ABE is therefore that available teachers simply lack the skills and motivation which are required to practice a participatory pedagogy. In-service training and teaching materials tailor-made for participatory pedagogy are the means adopted to maximize pedagogic participation.

One should not assume that learners invariably will welcome more participation, given the weak pedagogic skills that many instructors will have. Sometimes adults will feel that it is only when they are taught in a school-like manner that the teacher is doing her job—although they will demand the respect from the teacher to which adults are entitled.

A strongly participatory approach in ABE pedagogy is the REFLECT method that has been developed by ActionAid (Box 3).

The starting point of REFLECT is similar to what Rogers (1999:223) has described as a "real literacies approach," that the teaching should be based on the activities which learners already are undertaking or which they wish to do in their own life, rather than on generalized literacy tasks set out in a primer. A question yet to be answered is how far possible is it to develop this approach on a large scale within a single program? True, it is being tried out by many organizations and in many countries—which adds up to many people involved both as learners and as organizers and teachers, but in each country case REFLECT operates on a relatively small scale.

While a participatory pedagogy may stimulate the motivation of learners, it is also the case that adult learners who are highly motivated to begin with (e.g., because they receive strong social supports for their learning) also seem to endure relatively conventional pedagogy. Thus, in their review of project experience, Oxenham and Aoki (2000) conclude that if sufficiently motivated, adults can master the basic skills of education through any learning methods and materials available. They did not find any particular method or type of teaching materials to be uniquely important, but "that the closer the content to their concerns, wants and aspirations, the more likely are the learners to attend regularly and learn effectively." Eisemon et al. (1999:364) says that classroom-like teaching methods are not very appropriate but that it is otherwise difficult to generalize about "what works" since the techniques employed in effective programs vary greatly. But he also says that it is generally thought that it is desirable to make the objectives and contents of instruction concrete (thus echoing a standard recommendation for schools).

The importance of social support

It has always been good practice to mobilize support from community leaders for ABE. However, in addition it seems that it is an advantage to graft ABE activities onto already established social groups, and/or to use an approach to ABE that builds group ties among the participants. There are scattered findings in support of this view.

In Ghana, Korboe (1997:9) reports that attendance is better when a course is church-based than when it is not. Social support from the congregation is an advantage, while religious life provides a valued activity in which literacy can be applied. Another approach that relies on strong local group support is the Nijera Shikhi movement in Bangladesh (Cawthera 1997). The REFLECT approach also seems to function better when it has been adopted by an already established group than when a learning "circle" is established only for the purpose of learning.

Social support can be built by the way an ABE project operates, at the same time as one can benefit from existing social support by grafting ABE onto existing sustainable organizations that have a longer life than the ABE project itself and to which the participants have an existing loyalty (Bown 1990:40).

The very social conditions which will boost attendance and retention of those learners who initially enroll with the intention of completing the course can also attract some participants who will attend less regularly and who may not plan to complete the course at all—there will be on-lookers and well-wishers. Examples of such added fringe-participants are found in the REFLECT program in Bangladesh and India (Saldanha 1999, 2000).

Strong social support will promote internal efficiency. So will a pedagogy that treats adults with respect and, if teaching competence allows it, that involves the learners in an active way in their own learning. But such comparative findings as are available on indicators of internal efficiency (Oxenham and Aoki 2001, Table 1), with all the weaknesses which conventional indicators of internal efficiency will have for ABE, do not fit any simple set of explanations. For example, there is the relatively successful case of the Indonesian literacy program, which neither has any emphasis on participatory pedagogy nor any particularly strong community involvement (Pukat Pengembangan Agribisnis 1997).

The need for monitoring, evaluation and research

As noted in the review by Oxenham and Aoki (2001), what characterizes the internal efficiency of ABE programs is not that it is "low" but that it is highly variable among different programs. Great variation is also found *within* the same program—from site to site and among regions/districts. Local implementation is highly variable.

The completion rates and pass rates vary greatly among different districts in the National Adult Literacy program in Namibia. In the Kenya Literacy Program as of 1986–1987, great variation in test scores was found among the six locations included in the study by Carron *et al.* (1989:197). Similarly, the degree of literacy being acquired by participants varied greatly among the nineteen sub-counties included in the evaluation of literacy education in Uganda (Okech *et al.* 1999). The variation between sub-counties mattered more for learning outcomes in that study than did the type of program or the learners' prior exposure to schooling. There is apparently much variation in the quality of program implementation. This variation makes evaluation and monitoring important for implementation of ABE, so that one can learn from mistakes and take corrective measures when implementation is weak.

Monitoring of a special kind is required when ABE is government-financed but provisions are outsourced to NGOs and CBOs. One needs to establish whether the terms of contract have been satisfactorily met. At the same time, it is also important that the overall system of quality assurance of which monitoring is a part, is not mainly driven by the need to control, but to extend professional support to the providers. Whether the control and the support functions can be supplied by the same supervisory channels or by two different ones is an issue that needs to be carefully considered in program design for outsourcing.

In order to make more progress towards identifying specifiable conditions for success, there is a need for a better research base on ABE. For example, research on the functional skills learning in ABE and on the use to which skills are put is sorely lacking.

How should ABE be financed?

The World Bank's recommendation on financing basic education as provided in primary school is that the learners and their families should not have to pay tuition fees. When other fees are levied, it should be done in such a way that no child should be unable to attend school because of an inability to pay. The rationale for access for the poor without having to pay fees can equally be applied to ABE. In fact, since ABE will serve those who have received no schooling at all, or incomplete primary schooling, it will be self-targeted upon the poorest section of society. There is therefore a very strong case for financing ABE through the coffers of government, NGOs, and international development agencies.

A contribution from participants can be justified by the need to maximize resources under conditions of great scarcity, and on the grounds that a contribution in *some* form will strengthen their commitment to the course and better enable them to insist on a certain minimum quality in the teaching. The most affordable contribution that poor adult participants can make is their own labor. Sometimes this may be viable. If the literacy facilitator is a local person with a plot of land, participants can contribute labor to the tilling of that land. Or contributions of commonly needed foodstuffs could be made to the facilitator—the occasional sack of rice or sugar in the case of the Ghana national literacy program.

In some programs, the participants are asked to purchase reading and writing materials. This may deter some learners from joining—and some will attend, but without the needed materials. How serious such problems will be—for truly motivated learners, will depend on the price charged and on how much cash they have available. In the case of the PAPF program in Senegal (Box 2) participants are asked to pay a modest amount equivalent to US$4.5 for the eighteen-month course, yet dropout is low, and there is a large unmet demand.

However ABE is financed, it should, as in the case of primary school, ensure that nobody is excluded from attending because of inability to pay.

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1. Strong representation of women was noted right from the early years of UNESCO's support for literacy campaigns—also before improved gender equity in access to education was deliberately sought by the organizers (UNDP 1976:162).
2. Personal communication from Bank colleagues knowledgeable about education costs in Senegal.
3. Concerning outsourcing to NGOs in general (not only with respect to ABE), Eisemon *et al.* (1999:363) refers to a 1995 doctoral dissertation by Kambities of NGOs in Kenya in which was claimed that the fastest growing segment of NGOs in that country and many others in the region is secular, independent, indigenous organizations, many of which have been established by politicians and their relatives mainly to capture donor resources.
4. Exceptions include Bangladesh and India. Some initial literacy gains are reportedly achieved in these campaigns. The sustainability of skills acquired is more uncertain.
5. Mehran (1999) describes how religious education is a strong theme in literacy education in Iran.
6. For example, in the National Literacy Programme of Namibia, the completion of the three-stage literacy course is declared to be equivalent to the completion of grade four in the formal education system.

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Advice

The following advice is offered to Bank clients:

Recognize ABE as part of a country's Education For All strategy. Adult Basic Education should be an important part of strategies for achieving basic education for all, especially in countries with a high rate of illiteracy.

Provide finance and quality assurance. For ABE to be provided on a scale that goes beyond small pockets of activity, government would have to take a major responsibility in financing it. Government would also need to set standards and provide quality assurance. The best way to administer support to ABE need not be through the normal government departments. Other administrative arrangements are also possible and may be appropriate—e.g., a national literacy foundation or a special adult basic education fund. Actual provision may be through whatever mechanism is most effective in each specific case.

Give strong leadership. Competent staff would be needed to lead the renewal of ABE. Any deconcentrated approach requires a good distribution of skills, not only good staff at the central office. A strong lead also would need to be taken in promoting a supportive environment for adult literacy—for example, libraries, posters in local languages, radio broadcasting in support of ABE.

Target especially women and out-of-school youth, and include community leaders. In most African countries illiterate adult women will be an important target group (which need not mean that ABE courses should be restricted to women), as will out-of-school youth. Target community leaders. If their level of prior schooling makes them "too educated for ABE," they can still be involved as sponsors and supporters. Make special attempts to reach locations with high illiteracy rates.

Respond to demand. Prioritize sites where community groups/sponsors are ready to take the initiative to get ABE groups established. Meet demands for local adaptation of curricula and materials.

Build partnership with NGOs/CBOs and private enterprises. Consult and collaborate with NGOs. Financial support to provisions operated by NGOs/CBOs should be considered, regardless of whether government runs its own provisions. Encourage NGOs to form umbrella associations. Encourage private enterprises to mount ABE courses for their employees.

Use local languages for the initial course. Literacy is best taught in the learner's home language. If that is not possible, then a language the learner is already familiar with should be used. But ABE should also develop advanced courses that teach the official language.

Recruit teachers locally and use fixed-term contracts. Relying on volunteers is not sustainable in the long run. The most practical reward is cash. ABE teachers should be on fixed-term contracts. Give them a short initial course and back them up with supervision and in-service courses.

Include already established groups when ABE is set up. ABE benefits from being carried out in groups that have other reasons for meeting other than ABE alone—e.g., religious congregations, farmers groups, associations of micro-entrepreneurs.

Encourage ABE to evolve into continuing education. Encourage learners to continue after reaching basic literacy. Provide more materials for them.

Include HIV/AIDS in the curriculum. Teach protection against HIV and about how one should care for those who suffer from AIDS.

Encourage participatory pedagogy. Conventional one-way frontal pedagogy is not the best approach. Encourage more participatory approaches.

Use radio to back up ABE. Use radio to spread awareness about ABE and to provide background information for "functional themes" that are also of general interest.

Make ABE accessible to the poorest. Make ABE as cheaply accessible to adults as primary education is for children. No one wishing to attend ABE, should be unable to do so because of inability to pay.

Monitor, evaluate, and encourage research on ABE. Monitor enrollments, attendance, and dropout on a continuing basis, and use representative samples to check learning outcomes. A participatory form of formative evaluation that includes civil society and which gives voice to the participants in ABE is recommended. Encourage research on adult basic education.

What the World Bank should do

First, given the recognition of the importance of Adult Basic Education for poverty reduction, ABE should be seen as *one of the Africa Region's priorities* in lending for education because available evidence indicates that:

- ABE is an important complement to primary education in achieving basic education for all by offering a second chance to poor people who did not complete their primary schooling.
- ABE can strengthen the foundations of a broadly based and democratic civil society that will include the poor and generate demands for good governance.
- ABE has an immediate positive impact on the school enrollment and attendance rates of children of the poor as well as improving family health and raising productivity of livelihoods.
- ABE can be implemented as viable and affordable pedagogic systems.

Second, the Africa Region of the Bank should *advocate* adult basic education programs and encourage countries with significant levels of illiteracy to invest in such programs.

Third, the Bank should *help countries prepare* ABE programs and be ready to *lend or mobilize financial support* for such programs. Although nongovernmental and community-based organizations can take important roles in developing and delivering programs of adult basic education, only the state is in a position to ensure country-wide provision. Finance channeled through government is therefore needed—whether the actual providers of ABE be NGOs, local communities, or the state.

Fourth, the Bank should be ready to *finance capital expenditures* for the "tooling up" of a program (e.g., buildings and equipment, curricula and materials, initial training of managers and trainers, needed infrastructure), *as well as recurrent costs* (including payment of instructors), since ABE programs represent a stream of investment in human resources. Support for recurrent costs should be on an incremental basis and decline over the life of the project.

Fifth, *to improve and share the knowledge base* for good practice in adult basic education, the Bank should work with member countries and development partners to strengthen research and evaluation and monitoring of ABE, and to use available channels to share knowledge, especially to make good practice known to practitioners, planners, and policy makers.

Sixth, *guiding principles* should be:

- However initiated and whoever is the provider, ABE should show responsiveness to demand and be tailored to local contexts.
- ABE should be sufficiently integrated into public and private financial frameworks to ensure sustainability and long-term development.
- Bank clients should be advised to encourage the evolution of ABE activities into continuing education programs that go beyond the knowledge and skills covered in a basic course, and which include a wider range of self-help activities.

Finally, the Africa Region of the World Bank should strengthen its own capacity in terms of staffing and knowledge base to provide advocacy, encouragement, advice, and support for adult basic education.

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Illiteracy is a major barrier to reducing poverty. Basic education, with literacy and numeracy as core elements, is a foundation for raising living standards, fighting gender inequities, increasing entrepreneurship, and generally empowering poor communities to act more effectively in pursuit of their goals.

In too many African countries improvement and expansion of the primary school systems alone will not reduce adult illiteracy quickly enough to meet development objectives. The problem of illiteracy must be addressed not only by providing education to children of primary school age, but also through effective Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. ABE includes literacy and numeracy, as well as other elements, and targets adults who have not benefited from primary education.

This paper examines what is known about the beneficial impacts of ABE, points to ABE's importance in achieving Education for All, and identifies major policy issues. The study presents evidence that contradicts earlier claims about the poor performance of ABE programs, and discusses why Governments, the World Bank and other development agencies should invest in Adult Basic Education, advocating strong partnerships among government, nongovernment agencies and local community groups.

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